The Resistance to Christianity. The Heresies at the Origins of the 18th Century

Raoul Vaneigem

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Translator's Introduction

It's unfortunate that the author of this remarkable book, Raoul Vaneigem, did not take the time to write a concise and easily understandable "Foreword." Instead, as the reader will see, he dashed off something that only a few people — those who have already had the good fortune to read *The Movement of the Free Spirit,* which covers some of the same ground — would be able to fully understand. In addition, this chaotic, confusing and cavalier "Foreword" discusses the events and possibilities of the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries, while the book itself covers a period that, with the exception of the last section of the last chapter, ends with the Eighteenth Century (1793, to be exact). As a result, it is possible that very few readers will move beyond the "Foreword" and try to read the many chapters that follow it. And, of course, that would be a great shame.

Indeed, the "Foreword" to this book is so inadequate to the task at hand that we considered either supplementing it or replacing it entirely with the two short texts that introduce the English translation of *The Movement of the Free Spirit* (New York: Zone Books, 1994). But we decided against such interventions: Vaneigem certainly had his reasons for writing such a text. As he explains in the first chapter of *The Movement of the Free Spirit,*

> As he analyzed the reproduction and self-destruction of commodities Marx never asked himself how far his personal behavior obeyed economic reflexes. His critique is the product of an intellectualism that reproduces the power of the mind over the body; it is the work of a lasting influence of God on the material world.

Vaneigem also detects "intellectualism" — that is, a lack of traces of his own "personal behavior" and the "lasting influence of God" — in his own work. He writes in the "Introduction" to *The Movement of the Free Spirit* that

> This stubborn determination not to let anything take precedence over the will to live, to reject at whatever cost even the most imperative calls of survival, first took shape in my books *The Revolution of Everyday Life* and *The Book of Pleasures.* The latter was needed to clarify and correct the former, to remove the intellectual cast that won it high esteem from people incapable of putting its lessons into practice but who, instead, used them as a consoling alibi for their own premature aging.

And so, to counter the "intellectualist" cast and reception of *The Movement of the Free Spirit,* Vaneigem saddled *The Resistance to Christianity* with a "Foreword" that would discourage certain (many?) readers from misusing it or even reading it in the first place. This certainly explains the curious last sentence in his "Foreword": "If it is, finally, necessary to furnish an excuse for a style of writing in which one hardly finds the care that I give to the books that are not too far removed from the line of my life, I would like simply to say that each matter has been given the treatment that it suggests." Fortunately for us, this is as far as the parallelism between the two sets of books goes. While *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (written between 1963 and 1965, and published in 1967) is an excellent

book, *The Book of Pleasures* (1979) is a piece of crap; but both *The Movement of the Free Spirit* and *The Resistance to Christianity* are superb, indeed, much better than *The Revolution of Everyday Life.*

Let there be no mistake: *The Resistance to Christianity* is a scholarly work, even more so than *The Movement of the Free Spirit.* In his "defense" of "the cursory character" of *The Movement of the Free Spirit,* Vaneigem refers to "the sheer number of texts that had to be uncovered and translated." But if its predecessor was "cursory" or incomplete (it is in fact neither), then *The Resistance to Christianity* is exhaustive, even definitive. Not only does it incorporate the ground covered by its predecessor — that is, the resistance to Christianity (the "heresies") of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance — but it also extends this ground in both directions: forward into the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, and all the way back to the Seventh Century B.C.E. Like its predecessor, *The Resistance to Christianity* demonstrates an astonishing erudition: trained in Latin as a student, its author also calls upon works written in English, Italian, Dutch, German and, of course, French.

Vaneigem's motivations for reiterating the (best parts of the) material contained in *The Movement of the Free Spirit* were two-fold: he couldn't very well get to the Enlightenment without going through the Renaissance; and he couldn't simply refer his readers to *The Movement of the Free Spirit,* because — at least in its French version — the book wasn't reprinted by its original publisher after the first edition, which was hardcover only and appears to have been quite limited. Indeed, French-language readers had to wait until 2005 for the book to be reprinted. (Thanks to a 1998 reprint as a paperback, the English translation has never gone out of print.)

* * *

Born on 21 March 1934 in Lessines, Belgium, Raoul Vaneigem is best known for being a member of the Situationist International (the "SI"), which he joined in 1961. An unusual grouping of European radical artists, filmmakers and writers, the SI was founded in 1957 and dissolved in 1972. Between those years, the group reinvented the theory of proletarian revolution and propagated it through a journal called *Internationale Situationniste,* several books and a great many scandalous provocations. The SI was deeply involved in the protests, riots and occupations that nearly toppled the French government in May-June 1968.

Given this pedigree, one might be surprised that Vaneigem has been so interested in Judeo-Christianity, even if his interest is focused upon the beliefs and practices that have been categorized, denounced and forbidden as "heretical." Is not heresy simply the "negative" twin of orthodoxy? Were not the situationists dedicated to the abolition of religion as well as the abolition of capitalism and the State? The answer to both questions is "Yes." But in much the same way that his fellow situationist, Guy Debord (author of the anti-spectacular book *The Society of the Spectacle*), has made several films, Raoul Vaneigem has written several books on the subject of heresy. Unfortunately, few of them have been translated into English.

For Vaneigem, religious values and behaviors — guilt, self-hatred, fear of pleasure, the hope for a future heaven on earth and, above all, the contempt for the body and for the earth — persist (even) among those who consider themselves to be atheists and anarchists. They persist, not only in their political ideologies (which are often informed by the notions and practices of hard work, self-sacrifice and intellectual and moral superiority), but also in their psychological states (often imbued with weariness, resignation, self-contempt and a sense of impotence). Just like "the others" — the capitalists, the bureaucrats employed by the State and the "religious nuts" — atheists and anarchists all-too-often neglect or abuse their personal health, their capacities for (sexual) pleasure and the roles that women play in their organizations and actions.

And yet *The Resistance to Christianity* is not a pep talk or a self-help manual. It is a very serious historical (albeit subjective) investigation into the rise and fall of Judeo-Christianity. In his "Introduction" to *The Movement of the Free Spirit,* Vaneigem says,

> I want to challenge those who dehumanize history, seeing it as fated and fatal: hence my wish to pay homage to those who refused to give in to the idea that history moves toward some inevitable outcome. I want also to seek out signs of life, behind the edifices of religious and ideological obscurantism, and in so doing I hope to dispense once and for all with the cherished but no less dubious notion of a Christian Middle Ages.

Substitute "Western civilization" for "Middle Ages" and you will have an idea of what Vaneigem is up to in *The Resistance to Christianity.*

In this incredibly ambitious project, Vaneigem both relies heavily upon and disagrees with a number of "traditional" historians, but especially Norman Cohn, the author of *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Messianism in Medieval and Reformation Europe and its Bearing on Modern Totalitarian Movements.* Originally published in 1957, and revised and reprinted in 1961, this pioneering and exceptionally influential work claims that,

> Although it would be a gross over-simplification to identify the [Medieval] world of chiliastic exaltation with the world of social unrest, there were many times when needy and discontented masses were captured by some millennial prophet. And when that happened movements were apt to arise which, though relatively small and short-lived, can be seen in retrospect to bear a startling resemblance to the great totalitarian movements of our own day [...] The time seems ripe for an examination of those remote foreshadowings of present conditions. If such an enquiry can throw no appreciable light on the workings of established totalitarian states, it might, and I think it does, throw considerable light on the sociology and psychology of totalitarian movements in their revolutionary heyday.

As Greil Marcus has noted in *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the 20th Century,* the situationists "would carefully plunder" Cohn's book, which was published in France in 1962 under the title *Fanatiques de l'Apocalypse.* But the situationists saw the validity of Cohn's hypothesis only when it was inverted. In *The Society of the Spectacle,* Guy Debord points out that,

> The great European peasant revolts were likewise a *response to history* — a history that was wresting the peasantry from the patriarchal slumber thitherto guaranteed by the feudal order. This was the moment when a millenarian utopianism aspiring to *build heaven on earth* brought back to the forefront an idea that had been at the origin of semi-historical religion, when the early Christian communities, like the Judaic messianism from which they sprang, responded to the troubles and misfortunes of their time by announcing the imminent realization of God's Kingdom, and so added an element of disquiet and subversion to ancient society [...] So, contrary to what Norman Cohn believes he has demonstrated in *The Pursuit of the Millennium,* modern revolutionary hopes are not an irrational sequel to the religious passion of millenarianism. The exact opposite is true: millenarianism, the expression of a revolutionary class struggle speaking the language of religion for the last time, was already a modern revolutionary tendency, lacking only the consciousness of being *historical and nothing more.* The millenarians were doomed to defeat

> because they could not recognize revolution as their own handiwork. The fact that they made their action conditional upon an external sign of God's will was a translation onto the level of thought of the tendency of insurgent peasants to follow outside leaders.

Though he generally accredits this analysis, Vaneigem's position in *The Resistance to Christianity* is somewhat more nuanced. As he states in Chapter 33, "The great revolutionary movements gave to millenarianism a more ideological than religious form — nevertheless, it would be a mistake to underestimate the role of irrational and Joachimite faith in Nazi millenarianism, that is, in the antithesis of the projects of a classless society or an ecological paradise, both carried to consciousness by the successive waves of the economy." On the other hand — unlike Cohn and Debord — Vaneigem does not see a general consistency or uniformity in millenarianism. In his "Introduction" to *The Movement of the Spirit,* he says, "The partisans of the Free Spirit were divided on one fundamental issue."

> Driven by their will to follow nature, some identified with God and the ordinariness if his tyranny, using force, violence, constraint and seduction to secure the right to gratify their whims and passions. Others refused to countenance such a union between a despotic God and a denatured nature, a union whose exploitation found perfect expression in the myth of a divinity at once pitiful and pitiless. Instead they saw the refinement of their desires and the quest for a ubiquitous and sovereign amorous pleasure as a way of replacing the spiritualized animal and its labor of adaptation with an authentic human species capable of creating the conditions favorable to its own harmonious development.

All through *The Resistance to Christianity,* Vaneigem will highlight this division or disagreement among the so-called heretics. It is in fact the central theme of the book: "Yes" to Simon of Samaria and Marguerite Porete; "no" to the Cathars and Thomas Munzter.

Once this division has been drawn, and its significance has been recognized, the reader might fully understand the peculiar character of "modern life." Over the course of human history, have we not overcome all of the obstacles to freedom and happiness on earth that have been erected by the economy? Have we not ceased to be ruled and made miserable by the gods, God, the Church, kings and princes, dictators and political ideologies of all stripes? Yes, indeed — but we remain constrained by the economy itself, that is to say, by work and the commodity, by the production and consumption of pollution.

It is significant that Vaneigem doesn't remind his readers of the phrase NEVER WORK, which Guy Debord scratched into a wall on the Rue de Seine in Paris in 1953 and which was a decade later cited by the Situationist International as the "preliminary program for the situationist movement." Instead he offers (in *The Movement of the Free Spirit*) the following "good watchword": "The minimum of survival in the service of a maximum of life." The latter appears to be much less radical and memorable than the former, and perhaps this will comfort those who believe that Debord was right when he said that, after his departure from the SI in 1970, Vaneigem demonstrated the "impossibility of keeping quiet," a quality that "strictly co-exists with a total impossibility of speaking" (letter to Gianfranco Sanguinetti dated 13 August 1973). Though we do not wish to choose sides, it is also quite clear that Vaneigem had Debord, among others, in mind when he stated (once again in *The Movement of the Free Spirit*):

> What started as a revolution against misery turned into a miserably failed revolution, all because of a reluctance to be anything *for oneself*; and this failure still condemns even

> the most vociferous seekers of emancipation and happiness to the gall of impotence in which they acquiesce. Anyone who has the intelligence to comprehend the world but not enough to learn how to live, or who takes his self-hatred out on others, blaming and judging so as not to be blamed and judged himself, is, deep inside, no different from the priest.

In this context, it is interesting to note that, unlike Vaneigem's "watchword," Debord's slogan is phrased as a command, if not a "commandment" along the lines of "Thou shalt not work." It certainly would not have reduced this quality if Debord had written NEVER WORK, AND LIVE ACCORDING TO YOUR TRUE DESIRES. The Marx-like "intellectualism," the "lasting influence of God," would still remain.

* * *

To conclude, a few technical notes are necessary. The French text includes both footnotes and endnotes: the former, which are generally reserved for commentary (there are a few exceptions), are marked by asterisks; the latter, which are always reserved for the attribution of source materials and quotations, are marked by Arabic numerals. Wherever possible, we have incorporated the footnotes into the main body of the text within parentheses (thus) and have removed the asterisks. When this hasn't been possible, we have retained the asterisks and placed the footnotes, not at the bottom of the page, where they originally appeared, but immediately following the paragraph that contains them.

As the reader will see, we have taken the liberty of occasionally offering our own endnotes. We have done so when Vaneigem used an English expression in the original; when he has not translated into French a word, phrase or title that is in a language that we speak or can look up in a dictionary (German and Latin, respectively); when he has referred to someone or something that might be obscure to his readers in the English-speaking world; and when the reader might be interested in following certain connections that we have made.

When necessary, we have supplied within brackets [thus] words that the author failed to include. If we relished a certain play on words, did not choose a literal rendering of a word or phrase, or doubted the accuracy of our rendering, we supplied the original French in italics and within brackets [*ainsi*]. When the author's sentences have contained a great many sub-clauses, we have used parentheses (like this) for the sake of clarity and to avoid confusion. But when parentheses appear in quotations taken from the works of other writers, they have almost always been supplied by Vaneigem himself, and not by us.

NOT BORED!
New York City
March 2007

Foreword

On the shore where two thousand years of the Christian era have washed up, the rising tide of the commodity has not left standing a single traditional value of the past. By ruining the mass ideologies that had prematurely celebrated the collapse of the religious edifice, this tide — at a time when the State plays God in the conduct of [terrestrial] affairs — can it not ineluctably push towards the annihilation of the remains of a Church whose mysteries were socialized by The Council of the Vatican II?

The indifference that one today feels towards the beliefs governed by rituals performed by the Party or the ecclesiastical bureaucracy awakens, from the inside out, an interest that no longer supports an obsolete worry, no matter if it is apologetic or denigrating, but quite simply is curiosity preoccupied with its own pleasure and taking pride in the game of discovering what the official truths were so zealous to bury under the *ultima ratio*[1] of their dogmatic canon.

Can one imagine that Christianity, cleansed of the sacred apparatus by the great waters of *affairism,*[2] might escape from the crusher that has, in less than a half-century, dashed nationalism, liberalism, socialism, fascism and communism on the sacrificial rocks, while the generations watch with a mix of fascination and terror?

Now that it no longer subsists on the shipwrecks of yore and the sea that been spread out and weakly agitated by the smirk of derision, Christianity is a kind of archeology that suits the objects bristling with a gangue of holiness; inspiring respect or profanation, they now hardly solicit — I wouldn't say impartiality — but the naive indiscretion of a discoverer who has been denuded of both prejudices and cunning.

In the same way that it is now permitted to examine the birth, development and decline of Bolshevism without exposing oneself to accusations of materialism, spiritualism, Marxism, revisionism, Stalinism or Trotskyism — which today feigns to smile and be satisfied with the price of blood — one can focus on the Christian religion, which has been washed of the reputation and praises of theology and philosophy, on this archaic affrontery staged as a *trompe-l'oeil* in which the God of some and the non-God of the others meet in the heavens, their ideas at the same point in flight, at the same [level of] abstraction of corporeal and earthy reality.

With the feeling for the pre-eminence of the living mingles an astonishment that, for the *candide*[3], feels like the desire to know why and by which channels the world of ideas has so often required its book of flesh to be slashed in the heart for chimerical horizons.

* * *

The crisis of mutation, which today forces the economy to destroy itself along with the world or reconstruct itself along with the world, has at the very least the merit of disillusioning us about the origin of inhumanity and the means of remedying it. The politics of sterilization that has gangrenated the

[1] *Translator's note:* Latin in original, meaning "the last resort."

[2] *Translator's note:* Not just "rackeetering" business affairs, but worldly affairs, as well.

[3] *Translator's note:* A naive person. See Voltaire's novel *Candide, ou l'Optiminisme* (1759).

planet, [whole] societies, mindsets and bodies has demonstrated, by the pertinence of their extreme situation, how mankind — subjecting nature and his fellow men to market exploitation — produces, at the expense of the living, an economy that subjugates the living to a power that, at first, is mythical and then ideological.

Delayed by a system of exchanges that they created and that, while tearing themselves from themselves, determined them without ever completely mechanizing the body, consciousness and the unconscious, individuals have been, over the course of the millennia, powerless with respect to the formidable power that vampirizes them. How could their miserable destiny not induce them to put a halo on an absolute authority as perfect as the celestial vault, on the transcendence of a Father whose decrees manage fortune with misfortune, proclaiming the eternal and capricious instance?

Investing in an extra-terrestrial sovereignty, the mythical meaning of which only the priests had the power to decrypt, the economy, nevertheless, was inclined to unveil its fundamental materiality throughout the interests that, in a melee, insist that one can no longer profane the temporal masters and big players.[4]

Religion — that is to say, "that which binds"[5] — has placed in the hands of a fantastic deity the central link in a chain that, closed on both ends (tyranny and slavery), still anchors this celestial power to the Earth, on which scorn for oneself has been consecrated as sovereign, changeless, intangible.

* * *

Thus God drew from the cyclical, archaic world, which was enclosed within the ramparts and moats of the agrarian economy, a ceaseless perenniality that was refuted by the great tumults concerning the "end of time" by the innovative politics of commerce and free-exchange, which untied the loop of mythic time, corroded the sacred with acerbic spittle, [and] introduced the Trojan Horse of progress into the citadels of conservatism.

Nevertheless, despite the state of conflict that, in endemic fashion, opposed the conquest of markets to landed property, their antagonistic emanations — kings and priests, temporal and spiritual philosophy and theology — did not cease to constitute the agrarian structure and its still-dominant mindset, but also the two halves of God.

By decapitating Louis XVI, the last monarch of the Divine Right, the French Revolution killed both the bicephalic hydra of temporal and spiritual power, whose most recent crime in a long line of heinous crimes led the young Knight of La Barre[6] to be brought to the scaffold for the crime of impiety.

If Rome, deprived of the secular arms that maintained the truth of its dogma, slowly fell to the level of a spiritual scarecrow, this happened because the era of the lords and priests, and the dominant economy of the time, escaped recourse to it, avoided it, by abandoning the penal ferocity of the means of Rome's arrogance.

The *Ancien Regime,* definitively exhausted under the inexorable mass of market freedom and democracy reduced to the lucrative, dismantled itself as well as its ramparts, chateaux, crowned [*obsidionale*] mindset, and old mythic way of thinking.

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[4] *Translator's note:* "Big players" attempts to capture *les brasseurs d'affaires,* which literally means "the brewers of affairs," and might also be rendered as "people with a lot of pokers in the fire."

[5] *Translator's note: La religion — c'est-a-dire 'ce qui relie'.* This pun — something along the lines of religament — doesn't translate very well into English.

[6] *Author's note*: In the 1990s, the hostility — sly or declared — of the Catholic, Protestant and Jewish establishments [*milieux*] with respect to a novelist who'd been condemned by Islamic fanatacism to death for impiety speaks volumes about the democratic sincerity and the spirit of tolerance of those diverse sectarians of the "true God," who are quite fortunately deprived of the help of State terrorism.

* * *

From that moment, God succumbed to the magical spell [*coup de merlin*] cast by a State that reigned without the security of God's celestial acolyte. Christianity then entered the spectacular history of the commodity. At the dawn of the Twenty-First Century,[7] Christianity will be crushed, just like the other gregarious ideologies.

That Christianity continues to subsist at the heart of systems of ideas that supplant Christian mythology — including opinions that are the most furiously hostile to Christian allegiances — with a kind of religious spirit and in the sinister colors of fanaticism, the exaltation of militants and the hysteria of crowds, this demonstrates quite well the nature of the Great Masses solemnly held in esteem by the tribunes and haranguers of nationalism, liberalism, socialism, fascism and communism.

The hysterical tearing that throws Man beyond his body, so as to identify him with a collective and abstract body — a nation, a State, a Party, a Cause — is indistinguishable from spiritual membership, I might even say spiritual adherence to a God whose glance injects solicitude and scorn, and thus symbolically expresses the relations between the mechanical abstraction of profit and living matter that has been reduced to almost nothing.

Thus there have been more crises in the last three decades than in the previous ten millennia. By balancing ideologies on the scales of indifference, the *self-services*[8] of the consumable-at-any-price have, *volens nolens,*[9] stripped the individual of the characteriological turtle shell that dissimulates itself to itself, condemns him to constrained desires, without another way out than recalling the dead passion to destroy and to destroy oneself. Thus, little by little, one can see the awakening of a will to live that has never ceased to appeal to creation and pleasure, united in itself and with the world. Isn't it henceforth a matter of each person attaining the amorous possession of the universe?

Just yesterday an object manipulated by a Spirit and nourished by its very substance, the individual — discovering on the earth and in his/her flesh the milieu of his/her living reality — today becomes subject to a destiny that will be constructed by a renewed alliance with nature. Wearied of artificial desires that gave it lucrative reason and that, over the centuries, led it to a place where, with an amused curiosity, the individual can contemplate the objects that have objectified it and litter the shores of its past with fragments of a death that, today, is refused.

Although weak enthusiasm for herd-like manifestations indicate a constant decrease of religious and ideological faith in the industrialized countries, the follicules — by fits and starts able to galvanize a desperately lethargic, everyday spectacle — haven't failed, after several outbursts of archaism and barbarity, to cry for the return of the various religions and nationalisms. But, as Diderot asks, which ass will pass this shit? Which economic imperative, hastily rectified by despair and resentment, will be a buttress to the ramparts of another age and will prevent them from caving under the weight of the lack to be won?

* * *

No doubt the end of religious institutions doesn't signify the end of religiosity. Hunted by the debacle of the great ideologies — imperfectly satisfied by the sects, more and more badly lodged at

[7] *Author's note*: An arbitrary dating system that accredits a Messiah and today still recalls the extravagant appropriation of time by the Church.

[8] *Translator's note:* English in original.

[9] *Translator's note:* Latin in original, meaning "willingly or unwillingly."

the Churches (Catholic or Protestant) — the Christian sentiment now searches for new beds to cum in.

Will it find itself sleeping with a landscape that economic mutations are readying to remodel? Some people fell it coming in the wake of an ecological capitalism that draws from depollution a saleability that is hardly guaranteed by the desertification of the [earth's] soils, sub-soils and hopes for survival. It makes little difference to me who is the conjurer, Gaia, Magna Mater, Sylphides, Dryades or other elements. Moreover, each belief is not repugnant to the human to the extent that it doesn't require sacrifice.

On the other hand, I am delighted by the apprenticeship of the autonomy that, through the collapse of the supporters of and supports for the past, engenders the necessity of going it alone. The end of crowds, the [emergence of] individual consciousness of the fight for life, the cancellation of defeat and fear of self, from which all the other fears are derived, the emergence of a creativity that, substituting itself for work, directs the new generations toward a veritable humanity that, if its advent is not ineluctable, rests — for the first time in history — in the hands of men [sic] and, more particularly, children who are educated in the pleasure of life, rather than in its morbid refusal.

* * *

Such is the perspective according to which I wish to examine the resistance with which the inclination to natural liberty has, during nearly twenty centuries, opposed the *Antiphysis*[10] of Christian oppression.

In no domain — historical, scientific, philosophical, social, economic [or] artistic — can I conceive of an analysis that would want to exert itself outside of the individual histories in which the everyday gestures of those who have resolved to undertake it are inscribed. Although circumstances have saved me from contact with the religious thing, I have always felt a singular repulsion for a mortified empire, armored with a cross that's been driven into the hearts of all those who are born into life. Thus, I understand the indignation of Karlheinz Deschner as he thrashes — in *Kriminalgeschicte des Christentmus*[11] — the deaths, impostures and falsifications of the Catholic Church, but I do not know at what point his polemic — by penetrating into the terrain of the adversary — wins him recognition and interest, in which he takes pride. And why revive the embers of the millennium pyre with puffs of anger, when the wind of a new time has condemned them to be extinguished completely?

Besides, is there not something that protects people from the virtues of your sad threats of sanction in the obvious fact that atheists, freethinkers, anti-clericals and other militants of the "Good God in Shit" — far from giving up Judeo-Christian comportment — have often gone over to its most odious practices: sacrifice, cults of the martyr, guilt, guiltification, hatred of amorous desire, scorn for the body, fascination with the Spirit, quests for salvational suffering, fanaticism, obedience to a master, a cause, a Party? What better homage to orthodoxy than heresy, [or] non-conformism that infatuates itself with contesting the axis around which it gravitates?

* * *

Hardly interested in arbitrating the dubious combat between victims and torturers, I prefer to set free from the past — in which the forgotten, scorned, poorly understood, prejudged and calumnied

[10] *Translator's note:* In Rabelais, Physis is joyful and unashamed, and Antiphysis is hateful and destructive.

[11] *Translator's note:* The first volume of *The Criminal History of Christianity* was published in 1986. The author (born in 1924) has most recently published Volume 8 (2004).

are buried and often stratified by the famous objectivity of the historians — the scars that the human tissue, irrigated by the freedoms of nature, untiringly maintains so as to reconstitute and strengthen itself, weaving the social network from the ordinary, despite the deleterious effects of fear, dereliction, suffering, faith in the beyond and the consolations of death.

Thus I would seize the living from beneath the death that takes hold through a subtle mix of violence and persuasion that has been revived to deal with beings and things no longer indexed according to the traditional perspective, in which God, the State [and] the Economy collect the tears of the terrestrial valleys for a different happiness, and yet shudder from the beating of the wings of the living, who are more perceptible today because they no longer suffer [under] the weight of the old oppressions.

Therefore, the reasons to be amazed by a life that is so obstinate that it breaks through and re-flowers the asphalt of an inhuman history raise, in counterpoint, several doubts about the honesty and quality of the scholars and specialists who are accustomed to covering this history as if it were conquered terrain.

I admit that a theologian — whose craft of *repolining*[12] his God so as to once again point out the lightning-flash to the blind who do not perceive the ordinary evidence — prescribes the facts according to his manner of belief, by which he gives his jargon the outward appearance of a sensible language, calling desire a temptation, pleasure a sin, the embrace of lovers a fornication; which he venerates from the position of the Saint of the Rivals of the Heroes of the People honored by Lenin; which he erases from the Gospels according to the truth that Stalin accorded to the *Soviet Encyclopedia.* This is what follows, not from the lie, but from proselytism. But to encounter the same attitude when it is held by a historian who doesn't also inspire vast designs is enough, one will agree, to leave one perplexed.

What is one to think of the university scholars, who are instructed in the science of removing doubts concerning the authenticity of manuscripts that have been dangled from copyist to copyist and stuffed with interpolations, who make comments as if these were original texts and who date the *Epistles* by a certain Saul (a Roman citizen who lived around 60, whereas Tarse was only Romanized in 150) at the beginning of the Christian era, when they were rewritten, if not written, by Marcion, then revised by Tatien, and submitted to corrections in the Fourth Century?

No one is unaware that, at the earliest, the manuscripts of the canonical Gospels and the *Acts of the Gospels* appeared in the Fourth Century and constituted — under the aegis of Constantine — the library of propaganda that Eusebius de Cesaree and his scribes revised and distributed to all the Churches and that were thus universalized on the same dogmatic base. Apparently, the argument isn't of the type to trouble the good consciences of the researchers who, with a beautiful unanimity, take them for reports on the living, nearly contemporaneous with the witnesses or apostles of an Adonai, Kyrios or Lord. At the end of the First Century, the name Joshua/Jesus — with its symbolic meaning "God saved, saves, will save" — hardly imposes itself. The only dissonances in the ecstatic concert are the atheists Dupuy, Alfaric, Couchoud, Kryvelev, [and] Dubourg; the Catholics Loisy and Guillemini; [and] the Protestant Bultmann.

To designate polytheism and the cults of the "strangers to faith," the scholars do not hesitate to use the terms pagans and paganism, by which the Church signifies its scorn for the beliefs of the *pagani,* peasants, hicks, and bumpkins impermeable to the civilization of the towns. Is it a question of mentioning the angels of the Jewish pantheon, the semi-legendary Paul and Peter, the anti-gnostic Irenaeus, the philosopher Augustin of Hippone, the anti-semite Jerome, the spiritual master of the

[12] *Translator's note:* The word used by Vaneigem, *repoliner,* doesn't seem to exist in French. A typo?

Inquisition, Dominique de Gizman, the massacrer of the Fraticelles, Jean de Capistrano? Many are given the title "saint," with which the Church compensated its real and mythic servants. The same thing goes on in the biographies of Stalin in which, without derision, he is called "Little Father of the People."

* * *

It behooves atheism to polish the arms of critique with one of the most preemptory arguments by the Church, namely, the historical existence of this Joshua/Jesus, which accredits the legitimacy of its temporal power. Enraged enough to deny the divinity of Christ, a militantism of presumed freethought will fall into the trap of this Jesus, friend of the poor, a kind of Socrates preaching the truths of an evangelical Socialism and then dying on the cross due to the insolence of a pacifist tribune. Tertullien and the Christian movement of the New Prophecy could not have dreamed of a better future for their heroe — freshly purged of his Semitism and disguised as Zorro for the edification and salvation of the working class — than what existed in the second half of the Twentieth Century.

Once one admits the existence of an agitator and founder of the Church, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate — and this without the least contemporary [corroborating] testimony and while the name Jesus for a long time kept the meaning of the Biblical Joshua — , why be surprised that the spiritual scholars accept the false listing of popes and bishops that was drafted by Eusebius de Cesaree and that back-dates the canonical texts, interpolates writings from the Second Century and citations dating from the controversies of the Fourth and Fifth Centuries, and fixes as heretical — as if these ideas articulated themselves in the year 30 [C.E.] around an orthodoxy that had scarcely begun in 325 [C.E.] — the Dosithian, Nazarene, Sethian, Naassene, Ebionite, Melchisedequian, Elchasaite, Carpocratian, Basilidian, Marcionite, Antimarcionite, Montanist, Valentinian, Marcosian, Bardesanian and Novatian doctrines that had all kinds of origins and that the Constantinian Church — by crushing, remodeling [and] readjusting them — would use to fashion the unstable foundations of its dogma?

In the manner of Stalin recuperating Bolshevism and shooting Lenin's companions, the Catholic "Fathers" *a posteriori* condemned as heterodoxy, not only non-Christian things (*hairesis* in Greek), but also the diverse Christianities on which the throne of Constantine was raised. From their nests, the historians fall into step by discerning in Peter, "the first Pope of Rome," the meritorious efforts of a Catholic Church that was struggling with a heretical perversion that corrupted the integrity of its canonical teachings.

* * *

Although it does not appear to me denuded of utility to emphasize such an imposture at a time when one quite incorrectly thinks that the Pontifical authority and the clerical bureaucrats have survived the collapse of the last totalitarian citadels, I have found less charm in rectifying the opinion that nothing — other than some inertia of thought — continues to support the pretension to uncover these innervations of the living, which are often frail and yet generate a force that is incomparably more efficacious than the critical consciousness that intends to offend the tombstones of oppression.

Under the label of heresy, what is recovered of the labels by which the Church subjugated, by naming, diverse human and inhuman behaviors, the condemnation of which reinforced the superior power of orthodoxy? Episcopal rivalries [and] internecine struggles, as in Arianism, monophysism [and] English Lollardism. Or a dislocation — which the market in penitence and death exploited with

remarkable skill — of the limping body of the constraint of license, the asceticism of debauchery, [and] the repression of relief. Or a still-more secret attitude, which is the object of perplexity to the religious police: the individual will to find a destination that — contrary to the social forms of *antiphysis* — is better reconciled to the promises of a nature that had previously been relegated by its exploitation to the far side of the human. One will easily divine the types of heresies or irreligious remanences[13] to which my curiosity is the most willingly attached.

For the sake of several readers who are familiar with the *Treatise on Living*, *The Book of Pleasures* and the *Address to the Living*,[14] I make it clear that my endorsement in *The Movement of the Free Spirit* is applicable here: "A book has no other genius than the genius that finds a way to the pleasure of living better. It is thus agreed, from the beginning, that the study of the Free Spirit does not relieve me of such a requirement."[15]

On the other hand, a single merit must be granted to this work: I would love it if it misunderstood as little as possible the solicitations of the pleasures of knowing and the gay science. As a summary that, in the course of time, reveals itself to be the cleaning-out of the undergrowth of an uncertain history, this book — I have the feeling — at least will escape the risk of competing for the most errors, ignorant remarks and fabricated hypotheses with the majority of the volumes, monographs and scholarly works that have, in our era, been piled on the heads of Jesus, the apostles and their residual heirs.

If it is, finally, necessary to furnish an excuse for a style of writing in which one hardly finds the care that I give to the books that are not too far removed from the line of my life, I would like simply to say that each matter has been given the treatment that it suggests.

[Raoul Vaneigem]
January 1992

[13] *Translator's note:* Magnetic effects, images of traces of electromagnetic energy.

[14] *Translator's note: Traite de savoir-vivre a l'uage des jeunes generations* (Gallimard, 1967), translated as *The Revolution of Everyday Life*; *Le Livre des plaisirs* (Encre, 1979), translated as *The Book of Pleasures*; and *Adresse aux vivants sur la mort qui les gouverne* (Seghers, 1990), not yet translated into English.

[15] *Translator's note: Le Mouvement du libre-espirit* (Editions Ramsey, 1986), translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith as *The Movement of the Free Spirit* (Zone Books, 1994): "If it is true that the test of a book's intelligence is what it can offer toward the pleasure of living better, let me say, right from the start, that there is no such intention in my study of the movement of the Free Spirit" (p. 12).

Chapter 1: A Nation Sacrificed to History

Singularly and paradoxically destined, like the Jewish people: the Books or *Biblia,* which under the name Bible founded the Hebraic mythology, which, raised up by the elective glory of a unique God, aspired to reign over all of humanity. Invested with an eternal and universal truth, each person entered into the design only to lend him or herself to YHWH, at the cost of an effacement in time and space, of which no nation offers such an unhappy example.

Born within a Statist centralism that rallied [together] the nomads, hastily sedentarized on newly conquered territories, the arrogance of the God of the holy wars — by a cruel irony — would not cease to puff itself up with the wind of prophet-ism to the extent that the temporal power of the Hebrews, far from seizing the world so as to propagate obedience in it to YHWH, would succumb under the blows of the Assyrians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans, and would find itself extirpated from the very places in which it had been established over the course of nearly two millennia.

That a nation unanimously placed its lot in the hands of a God and [yet] everywhere and for so long experienced hostility, hate, scorn — its strange specificity doesn't lie in this. But what surprises is the fact that this nation kept faith, confidence and accredited a deity that was quite the contrary to it.

Situating themselves in a mythical history, the temporal aspect of which was only the shadow of a divine will, the Jews have undergone it as a malediction to which they subscribed by advancing a historical exclusion that they only brought forth in the Twentieth Century by obliterating the religious under the trademark of social preoccupations. Today, few believers deny that the army and the cooperative system offered to Israel are better guarantees than YHWH.

It's about time. Vilified, oppressed, massacred, imprisoned in the ghettos, they had not ceased to interpret the nightmare in an exegetical way. The malediction confirmed their status as the Chosen People; it conferred upon them — through the water, fire and blood of sacrifice and redemption, the ordeal and salvation, expiation and redemption — an existence that was thus metaphysical, *sub specie aeternitatis.*[16]

Expelled from Palestine in 135, after the collapse of their last insurrection, the Jews would be cast aside at the same time that their religion would be taken up by Christianity (which issued from Judaism), the political career of which would emerge in the Fourth Century under a Catholicism that conducted pogroms.

* * *

There isn't space enough here to make clear the detours by which a swaggering will kills itself through resignation, nay, dereliction, but it isn't useless to emphasize what one can call the subdivision of Hebrew expansionist ambition.

While a succession of reversals, saluted by prophetic agitators as just divine punishments, swelled with anger and blood the unmerciful myth of the God of Israel, a more pacific conquest made itself

[16] *Translator's note*: Latin in original: "under the aspect of eternity."

clear. Namely, a diaspora swarming to the four corners of the world colonies of Jews who, due to the intransigence with which they dwelled on the question of the unique God, did not find it repugnant to compromise when necessary to safeguard their right to asylum and financial interest. It was here, in the overture of the spirit that imposed the laws of commerce, that the cruel YHWH gave way to a more compassionate God, insofar as Mosaic rigor would accommodate a relaxation of its rituals. It was here that the "treason" of Judaism would foment itself, would implant Essene Judeo-Christianity by Hellenizing itself.

The Egyptian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek and Roman imperialisms included in their politics of expansion the recognition of the gods honored by the vanguished nations. Nevertheless, after the Babylonians, Greeks and Romans destroyed the Temple of Jerusalem and proscribed the cult of YHWH, he admitted of no other God than himself.

* * *

Once it accomplished the conquest of the territories of Canaan, the young and precarious Hebrew state remained on the defensive. It took root in an agrarian structure. Reassembling the nomads, it cemented the nation in a monotheistic bloc in which God, in solidarity with his people, created the Earth so that they could cultivate it and impose his law everywhere.

YHWH was still a God in formation when the Babylonian invasion in the Seventh Century [B.C.E.] brought down a serious blow upon the unitary myth, already dented by the schism between Judea and Samaria. YHWH began to carefully distinguish himself from the Canaanian God "El," a God endowed by women and children, and whose plural form, "Elohim," would not be foreign to the future dualism of Samaritan Jewish gnosticism.

The local branches of the diaspora did not constitute the bridge heads, the billeting of the troops prompted to mark out paths for the merchants. But the Jews were no less enslaved where the synagogue represented the Temple of Jerusalem. Although they were proselytes, these slaves isolated themselves in a defensive crouch, as if the immobility of the sacerdotal caste that was all the rage in Judea, Samaria and Galilee was weighing them down.

The dynamism of the industrious Jewish classes got entangled in the nets of the Sadduceean bureaucracy, the aristocratic caste of the functionaries of the Temple. Its conservatism concretized this God of conquest who had struck his faithful with powerlessness and who held as a salutary expiation the gift that they made of it every day of their existence.

The development of the modernist party, Pharisaism, arrived too late, when the Jewish nation was no longer a colony that the successive empires negligently inherited. The Phariseeans came up against it, in addition to the revolts of the extremist type that circumscribed their project of massacring the *goyim,* or nonbelievers, and adoring YHWH. When Essenism broke with the Yahwehism of the Temple, it undertook to promote an ascetic rigor[ism] that would nourish the madmen/guerrillas of the Zealots against the Roman occupation and Pharisian collaboration.

Lacking a bite on history, the Jewish people, made toothless by an all-powerful God who chose them, condemned themselves to the time of the holocaust.

* * *

Many times re-written and revised, the original kernel of the first biblical texts date from the 10th and 11th centuries before the Christian era, shortly after the establishment of the Hebrews in the land of Canaan.

They lived there as semi-nomads and in a mosaic of City-States of the tribes of the Semitic race. Nomads themselves, the Hebrews, the tribes of which had visited Mesopotamia and Egypt, and gleaned from them religious beliefs and techniques of organization, seized hold of a part of the land of Canaan under the leadership of a person whom their mythology gave the name Moses.

The formation of the Jewish nation worked around the priest/warrior, who presented himself as the instrument of a patriarchal and creative divinity.

The victorious combat against the raids led by the "people of the sea," the Philistines of the Bible, reinforced the political unity of Hebraic tribes and designed, with the grand stature of this El who would become YHWH, the triumphant symbol of Hebraic power reduced to annihilating the Semitic nations and their archaic gods: Dagan (the Dagon of the Bible), Astoreth or "Astarte," Baal-Zebub, popularized much later under the diabolical traits of Beezelbub.

Perhaps around 1,000 [B.C.E.] King David inaugurated monotheistic syncretism, because Statist centralism needed a transcendent power to impose its cohesion on the tribes, which traditionally had been independent. He arrogated to himself the function of the great priest, the temporally sacralized monarch, his power to guide the people chosen by El, the Father, creator of the universe and mankind, conceived so as to be obeyed.

The legend attributes to Solomon, son of David, the construction of the first Temple of Jerusalem, symbol of the faith and supremacy of the Jews, monument to monotheism, which hastened to destroy the invaders and that one day would be substituted for by the Basilica of Rome.

Nevertheless, the tyranny of Solomon provoked the secession of the northern tribes. Upon his death, they refused obedience to his son and, strong with the consent of Egypt, founded in 900 [B.C.E.] an independent kingdom in which the cult of El-YHWH, imperfectly implanted, clashed with the partisans of the ancient gods.

From then on, Palestine was split between two rival regions: in the south, the kingdom of Judea, with Jerusalem as its capital; in the north, the kingdom of Israel, including Samaria and Galilee (today Jordan).

Over the centuries, hate and scorn pitted Judea against Samaria, the former sheltering itself in the jealous cult of YHWH; the latter, more tolerant, offering itself to new ideas and Greek influences.

Because the Samaritans weren't part of the Judean tribe, the Judeans considered them, not Jews, but *goyim,* non-believers, generally associated with the anathema "May their bones rot."

The opposition between Judeans and Samaritans explains an important part of the Hellenization of Jewish Gnosticism, omnipresent in the first Christianities. It especially explains the anti-Judaism that animated the "Men of the Community," the Essenes, and that Greco-Roman racism would disguise as anti-Semitism.

Priding themselves on being the true children of Israel, they only retained as sacred the Books of the *Pentateuch*: *Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers,* and *Deuteronomy.*

On the mountains of Ebel and Garizim, which were estimated to be more powerful than the Temple at Jerusalem, were raised the places of the cult. For them, YHWH, God of war and conquest, had not abolished El, the father, from whom he issued, nor the tetrad that he originally formed with his wife Asterath (Astaroth, Astarte), and their sons and daughter.

For the Samaritans, two feminine divinities subdued the merciless patriarch whom the Judeans claimed for themselves. So it was not by chance that women occupied a preponderant place in the philosophy of the physician and philosopher Simon, to whom all the varieties of Christianity — and Catholicism in its turn — would impute the origin of a thought radically hostile to the religious spirit.

* * *

In 722 [B.C.E.], Samaria succumbed to Assyrian invaders. The population, reduced to servitude, took the road of exile. Thenceforth, foreigners reigned over the territories that the legendary Moses decreed "the Promised Land" and into which Joshua led his people.

In 586 [B.C.E.], Nebuchadnezzar seized the kingdom of Judea, razed the Temple and destroyed Jerusalem. Among those who survived, the notables and rich people were led away as slaves and "there only remained very few people [...]. The historians designate communally under the name of Judaism the form taken by the religion of the Jewish people after the destruction of the First Temple and the captivity in Babylon."[17]

This defeat — the first in a long series — at the same time brought forth an apology as desperate as it was frenzied from the all-powerful God, as well as an exacerbated feeling of collective guilt. At each reversal, the litany of wandering prophets exalted the grandeur of YHWH, going over and over again in the psalmic fashion the calling of the Jewish people to dominate the world and to prove in its heart the just expiation of its lack of faith.

Thus, biblical mythology resounds with hymns to expansionist bragging as much as (in counterpoint) it takes offense at the sour harmonies of a guilt that is endlessly harped upon. The beating of guilt rhythms the Bible and the fluttering of the wings broken by Hebraic power.

Without too much difficulty, polytheism revoked one or the other of the divinities who were incapable of satisfying the prayers that were addressed to them. Does the supplicant not dare to threaten vexatory measures to the god who maladroitly does his job? But when it is a question of a unique God, the father of a national family whose children must fear, tremble, venerate and love, as well... Because YHWH would multiply the Chosen People as much as there are grains of sand by the sea; he would guarantee to them a prosperity without parallel; all peoples would incline themselves before the grandeur of Israel and would serve it without a murmur. That history continues to ruin the promise of such a brilliant glory — this is not what embarrasses the believer, who is little disposed to accuse the just and terrible YHWH of perjury, powerlessness or perversity.

No, it is evident that the guilty ones were the Jews themselves, unworthy men, who — by their split between the kingdoms of the North and of the South — profaned the heritage of David, while the weakness of their zeal drew down the just wrath of the Lord. The cruelest of enemies — the Babylonians, Persians, Greeks and Romans — wove between the hands of the Eternal the net of unhappiness and redemption. Because, if the children of Israel amended themselves, resigned themselves, graciously, to misfortune with a morbid joy — claiming their unshakable confidence in the fire of the ordeal — then divine mercy would bring down upon them his perpetual grace. Such is the essential message of the biblical prophets and the sacralized texts; men are invited to cover themselves with imprecations so as to redeem the incongruous conduct of a God whom, having chosen to overwhelm an emerging empire with opprobrium, no longer hesitated to annihilate the universe that he created.

There is no doubt that this is a unique phenomenon in history — a State, possessed by an invincible God and dispossessed of any victory, in which germinated the project of a universal theocracy, a millennium sanctifying the earth, a holy war in which the combatants have no arms other than the teardrops of their bodies to confront the enemy.

Once more, it was in Samaria that, against Yahwist intransigence, there emerged the dualism that opposed a good God, unknowable, ungraspable and not of this world, to the God of war, the Demiurge,

[17] M. Simon, *Le Judaisme et le Christianisme antique,* Paris, p. 49.

creator of a bad world; which was an idea later adopted by Christianity of the Nazarene type, as well as by the hedonistic gnostics of the Carpocratian school.

* * *

Where the political and military development of Judea ends, there begins the myth of religious imperialism.

A veritable cursed saga, remodeling the most ancient texts, inscribed itself on the steps of the Temple sacked by the Babylonians. For past heroes it had the "Judges," priests and warriors charged with leading the holy war in the name of YHWH. They were helped — and here there was the heritage and recuperation of the pre-Yahwist cults — by women, prophetesses, such as Deborah, who commanded the tribes of the north. The *nazirs* [non-believers], ascetics and combatants devoted to God — Samson, for example — composed the shock troops.

The traditional rivalry between the temporal prince and the priest shows through in the fate reserved for kings: honored in the narrative books [of the Bible], they were shamed in the prophetic books and the Psalms. For the fanatics of holy war, God is king and has no need to lead his people to the type of victory won by a head of state. Nevertheless, it happens that a particularly pious king dressed up in the traits of a saint and was called *Messiah,* "anointed by the Lord," which the Greeks translated as *Christos.*

Eli and Elise propagated the cult of YHWH in the towns and countrysides against the sectarians of Baal and the ancient gods. Jeremiah, agent of the Assyrian party against Egypt, preached the uselessness of the struggle against Nebuchadnezzar. He placed the stubborn defense of religion above political preoccupations, as if the unquestionable supremacy of God implied the infallible grandeur of people among whom growing misery was only the secret sign of a triumph that was all-the-more assured by its delays in manifesting itself on the derisory level of human temporality.

Under the Roman occupation, the Pharisaian party would not act otherwise, collaborating with the enemy for the greatest glory of the God who tested it. Situating itself under the eternal gaze of the divinity, the spirit of Judaism became ahistorical. Prophets and heroes changed names and dates by remaining the same. Adam, Moses, Joshua, and Esaie did not end up being present at every moment.

* * *

Around 550 [B.C.E.], the Babylonian empire could not resist the assault of the Persians. In 536 [B.C.E.], Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to their native land and reconstruct the Temple. Only the poorest remained in Palestine. Many exiles enriched themselves in Assyria and Babylon as merchants, entrepreneurs and bankers — to Nippour, the Murashu bank offered a perfect example of the successful Jew. They [the Jews] felt themselves to be among their co-religionists, re-grouped in little communities.

Thus, there began the phenomenon of pacific expansion — a mix of forcible exile and voluntary emigration — that the Greeks would give the name *diaspora.*

The diaspora offered the particularity of founding the Jewish branch-offices that constituted so many enclaves of monotheistic Judaism in *goyische* territory. The theology closed off from the agrarian myth doubled itself thanks to the spiritual overture that implied commercial practice and the circulation of commodities.

Implanted in polytheism, the synagogue represented the Temple of Jerusalem, but was disentangled from the sacerdotal despotism of the Sadduceans and consequently more receptive to religious

innovations. This is the place where the Pharisaian party and the diverse Esseno-Christian tendencies confronted each other in the First Century.

* * *

The end of exile did not involve the re-establishment of a monarchy. Under the control of the Persians, the Jewish state transformed itself into a theocracy. The Great Priest of Jerusalem directed a sacerdotal bureaucracy that, leading a dissolute existence, employed itself in collating and revising the ancient texts, of which the corpus would sanctify the unity of the nation under the shephard's crook of the supreme God, the only one called upon to reign over the world that he had created. The end of the power rivalries in the leadership caste would, much later, produce the Sadducean party, conserver of orthodoxy in the kingdom of Judea that claimed a monopoly over Judaism.

The people of the Temple, for whom rapacity was matched with a ritualism that replaced faith, sometimes responded with the indifference and passivity of those who submitted to despotism, and other times with an outburst of religious vehemence, appeals to purification, mortification and asceticism propagated by the prophets who were prompted to inflame the latent revolt of the artisans, small merchants and plebeians. By the revelations or "apocalypses" (as the Greeks say) of the fanatic illuminati who announced in a great cry the imminence of the end of time and easily gained the adhesion of these crowds in which shoemakers, carpenters, woodworkers and bakers did not disdain from playing the Rabbi and lending to their claims the cheap finery of religious speculation. Such would be the ferment of the future sects.

From before 450 [B.C.E.], the old Samaritan schism engendered dissidences with Yahwehism. The *Letters from Elephantine* (Assouan), re-written on the occasion of a frontier skirmish between Israeli mercenaries in the service of the king of the Persians and the Egyptians, showed the importance to the Fifth Century of the religions distinct from Judean monotheism.[18] One honored it in the God Iao, derived from El but seemingly different from YHWH. Sometimes confused with the demiurge Ialdabaoth, Iao would be invoked much later by many Gnostic sects, including the Sethians. His name found itself frequently mentioned in the magical conjurations, rituals of spells, notebooks of execration, and talismanic stones called abraxas. And also celebrated the goddess Anath Bethel, from whom the mysterious Barbelo of the non-Christian Gnostics may have issued. Assim Bethel, child of Iao and Anath, already passed for the Son of God.

* * *

In 400 [B.C.E.], the Persian empire crumbled under the power of the economic, political and cultural imperialism of Greece. In 331 [B.C.E.], the victory of Alexander marked the end of Persian domination.

Upon the death of Alexander in 323 [B.C.E.], the Hellenic empire exploded, Egypt passed into the hands of Ptolemy, and Syria and Palestine ran aground at the Seleucides.

It was at this time that the antedated books were drafted so as to halo them with the prestige of ancient times. The Catholic Church, too, would move back the dates of its canonical Gospels for identical reasons.

Deuteronomy, falsely dated back to 622 [B.C.E.] and inspired by the return from Babylon, would re-define itself in the more ancient framework of the exodus so as to accentuate the role, in some sense re-actualized, of Moses, around whom was restructured the unitary myth that operated in a synthesis of the three great currents of thought: royal, sacerdotal and prophetic.[19] *Ezekiel,* which had

[18] J. Hadot, *Histoire des religions,* Brussels, 1980–1981, p. 14.
[19] *Ibid.,* p. 27.

been projected back between 586 and 536 [B.C.E.], presented its heroes as if they were prophets and sacerdotes, even though the sacerdotal function did not yet exist. The priests described were identical to the "Sons of Sadoq," a sect founded around 300 [B.C.E.]. The last part of the *Book of Ezekiel* proposed a religious and nationalist eschatology: a great river flowing underneath the Temple so as to irrigate the holy earth while the final struggle against Gog, the enemy of Israel, whom Torrey identifies with Alexander.[20]

The *Book of Proverbs* betrays, in its first nine chapters, a Hellenic influence: several traits recall a book by an Egyptian [called] *The Sage of Amenope.* It is significant that, little by little, the counsels of politeness and everyday civility dressed themselves up in a religious ritualism.

Favored by Hellenization, the poetic books [*les livres sapientaux*] founded a tradition that would play an important role in the Second Century redaction of the *Logia,* that is, the remarks attributed to Joshua/Jesus.

Through perpetual re-writing, the corpus of the sacred books — the Greek plural noun *biblia* that ends up in the singular noun *Bible* as if to suggest the idea of a unique book dictated by the unique God — wanted to be a celestial monument dedicated to the absolute power of YHWH, sculpted with bitterness, hate, dereliction and megalomania, which secreted a mindset resigned to support the foreign yoke and which drew from suffering its reason to exist. And this book has only ever reflected the ignominy imposed on its scribes, the generations that proposed it as a model to more than half the world.

Sadduceism would impute to the epic hero Moses the care of having prescribed, in all their details, the rites, costumes, frocks, and objects of the cult around which the sacerdotes moved, instilling the omnipresence of God in the routine of gestures and comportments. The most ancient texts, legendarily attributed to the same "Father," would thus be periodically reviewed, nay, corrected by prophets such as Dosithee, who, in the manner of many, characterized himself as the "new Moses."

Antedating him as well, the text known under the name *Esaie II* contains a part entitled "The Songs of Servitude to YHWH" (50–53), the theme of which inaugurated the legend of the suffering Messiah. The Servant, a man resolved to sacrifice himself and die for the salvation of nations, was scorned and misunderstood: "We rejected him, we did not make anything of him. Nevertheless, they were our sufferings that he carried [...] The punishment that gave us peace fell upon him. And it was by his bruises that we were cured" (53). Here appeared for the first time the literary prototype of the envoy of God who dies for the salvation of all. The Essenes applied this model to their Master of Justice, who was put to death around 60 [B.C.E.], before the Nazarenes and their enemies of the Pauline school invested the Messiah that they called Joshua and the Greeks called Jesus.

* * *

Encouraging the refusal of obedience of Samaria to Judea, the Greek occupation allowed the Samaritans to erect in the region of Ebal and Garizim a temple distinct from the one in Jerusalem. They thus encountered in the north the welcome that Judea refused to give. In Samaria, from the conjunction of Judaism and Greek philosophy was thus born a thought oriented around the knowledge of self and the world — Gnostic thought — that took root as much in religious speculation as in a feeling for life that revoked all forms of religion to the profit of a magic hermeticism, nay, a somatic analysis, such as that of Simon of Samaria.

[20] C.C. Torrey, "Certainly Pseudo-Ezekiel," *JBL,* 53, 1934.

Such a spirit of modernity would easily propagate itself in the communities of the diaspora, in the Jewish colonies of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Syria, Asia Minor, Rome and the Gauls.

From the Samaritan schism derived the sects that opposed different conceptions of Judaism: Sadduceans, Pharisaians, Esseno-Baptists who would form the original Christianity that spread throughout the Nazarean and Ebionist groups.

The Samaritans did not recognize any sacred texts other than the Pentateuch and the book that Joshua promised to a certain future under the name of Jesus. The manuscripts discovered at Qumran contained similitudes that accredited the close relationship between the Samaritans and the Essenes; they differed from the Masoretic texts, which were exegetical enterprises on the sacred books written by Masoretes or Jewish physicians.

From 300 to around 165 [B.C.E.], the Hellenization of Palestine impregnated the religious literature of a thought that was radically foreign to the Jewish mindset. Two civilizations clashed: one based on an agrarian economy and the commercial activities that situated themselves at the exterior of the frontiers, in the branch-offices and communities based upon an intransigent monotheism; the other, essentially mercantile, propagated its logic and rationality everywhere that its system of exchange penetrated.

Nothing is more antagonistic than the mythic, analogical and ahistorical spirit of the Jews and the Greek *Logos,* the linear time of the historians, the usage of syllogism, analysis and synthesis, a reality in which the Gods drew their splendor from the capricious facets of destiny.

The Indo-European structure of the Greek language very imperfectly rendered Hebraic idiomatics, with its atemporal verbs, word play, magical sounds, phonetic equivalences, numerical values attributed to letters — elements that lent to the pre-evangelical *midrashim* significations that developed the Kabbalistic speculations, but that, all things considered, were a dead letter for the Greeks and ended in mistranslations. ("*Midrash*: Jewish (or Samaritan) exegesis. Term derived from the Hebrew *DRS,* 'to look, to search.' Among all the rabbinical *midrashim,* commentaries on the Torah, and then the Bible in its entirety, it is fitting to cite the *Midrash Rabbah,* the Great Midrash, a Hebraic compilation of which certain portions date back to an epoch much before the First Century."[21])

Although it attests to the universal curiosity of the Greeks, the translation of the so-called "Septante" (because it was legendarily attributed to seventy translators) of the Biblical texts appeared to the Masoretes and Jewish physicians as a sacrilege and a betrayal of the Biblical message. It is here — it is not useless to say — that Joshua found himself, for the very first time, translated by *Iesous,* Jesus.

After the Alexandrian epoch, two literary genres were diametrically opposed, but both entered into the fabrications of the novels about Jesus: the "wisdom" that bore the stamp of Hellenic morality, and the "apocalypses" or "revelations" (prophecies that were hostile to the Greeks and then to the Romans) that were rooted in the Hebraic myth of the all-powerful God, for whom punishments were the wages of love and redemption.

Issuing principally from Egypt, "wisdom" Hellenized itself in Palestine through two texts headed for a great radiance: *The Wisdom of Jesus ben Sira* or, more precisely, *Wise Instruction and Proverbs polished by Simeon, son of Jesus, son of Eleazar, son of Sira.* Although the Pharisians excluded it from their canon, the *Talmud* cites it nearly 80 times. The Catholics would make it one of their books of predilection under the title that was imposed around 250 [C.E.] by the Bishop of Carthage, Cyprian: the *Ecclesiasticus liber,* in French, the *Ecclesiastics.* (Not to be confused with the *Qohelet,* "He who speaks in the assemblies," called *Ecclesiastes* by the Catholics — in Greek, "assembly" is *ekklesia,* Church — , a

[21]B. Dubourg, *L'Invention de Jesus,* Paris, I, p. 251–260.

text from the Fourth Century before the Christian era that communicated unusable banalities about the bitter destiny of man and the ignominy of woman.) The epistle falsely attributed to Jacob borrows from it a great number of expressions; thus the *Logia* were attributed to Jesus; Simeon, who become Simon-Peter, also figured in them.

An early Hebrew manuscript from the Eighth Century [B.C.E.] was exhumed in 1896 from the *gennizah* (a reserve in which the sacred books that were no longer used were stored) in a synagogue in Cairo. The authenticity of the text was confirmed by the discovery, in 1964, at Masada — the high place of the Zealot resistance to the Romans — of a scroll that contained important fragments in their original Hebraic versions. (Yadim situates the redaction of the text in the pre-Herodian period, around 400 [B.C.E.], between *Esaie I* and the *Manual of Discipline.*[22]) The work was attributed to Rabbi Sira (around 190 [B.C.E.]). His young son Joshua/Jesus had it translated into Greek around 117 [B.C.E.]

In the era of Rabbi Sira, the Seleucides — masters of Syria and Palestine — attempted to break the monotheistic rigor of the Jews by forced Hellenization. In 165 [B.C.E.], the revolt led by Mattathias Maccabee and his son, Juda, demonstrated one more time that State tyranny never puts an end to religious tyranny, but reinvigorates it with the same authoritarian principles that must destroy it. Insurrection would offer a model of heroic and desperate holiness to the struggle that the Zealots — on the initiative of Juda of Gamala and his two sons, Jacob and Simeon — would much later conduct against the Romans.

By prohibiting the exercise of the cult in the Temple, the Seleucide King Antiochus IV Epiphane (215–163 [B.C.E.]) succeeded in convincing the Jews of the vanity of terrestrial empires and the interest of celestial knowledge, the imminence of which prophetic agitation proclaimed.

The author of the *Wisdom* did not reject Hellenism, but strove — like Philo of Alexandria, but much later — to assimilate it into Judaism. His faith in the final victory of the Chosen People was not rejected by the luminaries of Greek thought.

The true son of Israel was a sage. Wisdom [*sagesse*] would save it, because "he who seizes the Law receives wisdom" (15, 1). Crowning messianic hope, *sophia* (wisdom) played the role of great mediator between God and man: "She appears as a mother, like a virginal wife she welcomes him, she nourishes him with the bread of prudence, she gives him the water of wisdom to drink."

The Greek word *Sophia,* which translates the Hebrew word *Hochma* and the Aramaic word *Achamoth* — two feminine terms that also designated the Spirit — assumed a considerable importance in the Esseno-Christian gnosticisms and the hedonistic currents in which figured, under a great variety of names and forms, that which provides salvation to men. Wife, mother and virgin, Sophia was at the origin of Myriam-Mary, the virgin mother and her companion Mary of Magdala (as presented in the *Gospel attributed to Thomas*), but also the Holy Spirit descended upon the Messiah.

Drafted around 50 [B.C.E.], the *Wisdom of Solomon* allied with Judeo-Greek thought a magical conception that would be known in the Hermetic current and would become all the rage, in particular, in Alexandria. Flavius Joseph recalls in *Judaic Antiquities* that "God even accorded to him [Solomon] the comprehension of the art against demons in the service of the usefulness and healing of men. Having composed incantations thanks to which sickness is relieved, he left behind the exorcism formulas by which the possessor chases away the demons so that they may never return."[23]

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[22]Y. Yadim, *The Ben Sira Scroll from Masada,* Jerusalem, 1965; Th. Middendorp, *Die Stellung Jesu Ben Sira zwischen Judentum und Hellenismus,* Leidenn, 1973.

[23]Flavius Joseph, *Antiquities judaiques,* Paris, 1929, VIII, 45.

An extract from the *Wisdom* attributes to Solomon the knowledge "of the power of spirits and the thought of man, varieties of plants and the virtues of roots" (7, 20).

One has wanted to detect here the ideas of an Essene community of the Mareotis Lake, which Philo names Therapeutes, and it is true that Judeo-Greek magic is not absent from the texts of Qumran.[24] Christian Gnosticism of the First and Second Centuries included thaumaturgic groups by which the diverse evangelical novels concerning Jesus were inspired, so as to disguise their heroes as exorcists, healers and schemers of miracles.

Rejected by the Pharisaian synod of 80–90, the *Wisdom of Solomon* would enter into the Catholic canon. The Platonism in which Biblical mythology seemed to melt lets one glimpse the supercession of Judaism, for which the Hellenized Christianities of the second half of the Second Century worked.

* * *

On the other hand, the hostility to Judaism in the encounter with Hellenization was exacerbated through a mode of original expression: "revelation," better known under its Greek form, "apocalypse" — a term that much later assumed the meaning "universal catastrophe."

A cyclical thought that curls around in the vivid foreshortening of birth and death, the origin and the end of time, the alpha and omega of a world created so as to annihilate itself in its terrestrial form and be reborn in a cosmic beyond, the apocalypse drains in a sudden rage the multiple reasons for finishing with an existence that is condemned to unhappiness. Its suicidal resolution has avenging accents, because none of the powers would escape from the egalitarian leveling of the death that it announces. Over the centuries, the oppressed creature would discover in apocalypse a panacea for the malediction of injustice, the end of the centuries, which founds the hope for the Great Night and the days after it, which sing. It is the song of an immobile history, fixed in its glaciation, that can only shake [loose] a total explosion. Born in the rupture of archaic Judaism with history, it reappears every time that hopeless oppression explodes under the blows of a hopeless revolution.

Judaic and Christian literature contains 50 apocalypses. Two of them twinkle with a particular glimmer in the speculative torrent that would furrow the historical landscape in which Christs and Messiahs proliferated.

Under the name of the legendary patriarch Henoch, the *Parables* contain an apocalypse, the influence of which marked the myth of Jesus among the Christians. At the end of an ascension that leads him to the Kingdom of the Heavens, Henoch sees the Son of Man, that is to say, Adam, and discovers his true nature: the Son of Man collaborated in the creation of the world as an integral part of YHWH; he then sits at his right hand and, at the end of time, which is imminent, he returns to earth to deliver mankind from its pitiful condition.

The *Apocalypse attributed to Daniel* reflects the struggle of religious Jews against the political Hellenization of Antiochus IV Epiphane. By an artifice that betrays less of the deliberate lie than a cyclical vision of history, this work aspired to a previous epoch and thus foresaw the future. The author antedated the prediction of events that in fact took place under his own eyes, around 165 [B.C.E.], during the revolt of the Maccabee family and their partisans, the defenders of faith.

Obeying a mythical logic, thus conforming to the structure of Hebrew — which hardly accords with the rationality of Greek, which sinks to render Hebrew — the recitation transposed the political situation to the divine plane. Michael, the chief of the angels and the protector of Israel, used his power to save his people. The visionary prophesized the ruin of four great oppressive empires: the

[24] C. Puech, "Un rituel d'exorcisme (11 Q Ps Ap)," *Revue de Qumran,* XIV, #55, 1989.

Babylonian, the Assyrian, the Persian and the Greek. The effective disappearance in 165 [B.C.E.] of the first three, of course, augured the ruin of the fourth, and revived the ardor of the combattants by demonstrating that God would never surrender his people to an impious domination. The fact that (once again) the crushing of the Jewish insurgents threw a bitter shadow on the anthem "the time is near for His power and His justice to restore Israel to its glory" did not exhaust the source of a type of inspiration that, far from being discouraged, was stimulated by failure.

The last Jewish apocalypse would also be, under its harshly Christianized form, the only one that was retained by the Catholic canon, despite those who flourished up to the Sixth Century. The original Jew (lost) no doubt stigmatized the Roman politics of Tiberias, who from the year 19 [C.E.] encouraged the pogroms in Rome and prohibited the Jewish religion in Italy.

The Greek version, attributed to John, adopted the schema of all of the revelations: evil has perturbed the divine order; the revelation means to restore this order so as to propagate on earth the kingdom of the heavens and the saints. The unleashing of calamities sounds the announced hour of the Days of the Savior, the extermination of the wicked, and the glory of Jerusalem. The era of prosperity, peace and paradisical happiness would coincide with the triumph of the "communities," the Essene churches.

By claiming that only blind faith in God would vanquish the enemy, the *Apocalypse attributed to Daniel* dressed up in divine emanations the manifesto of the Assideans, the fanatical observants of Mosaic law and the shock troops of the Maccabean insurrection. The Apocalypse tardily attributed to John resounds, in parallel fashion, with the echoes of the Zealot program; perhaps the rage to destroy Rome was not foreign to the fire of 64 [C.E.], which has been so unreasonably imputed to Nero.

The Maccabean wars also date the Psalms, songs of praise to God by the devoted, the rhythms and repetitions of which are obeyed with care so as to impregnate spirits and comfort faith.

Chapter 2: Diaspora and Anti-Semitism

While the Hebrew word *galout* (exile) was used in a theological perspective and implied an eschatology of uprooting and return, the Greek term *diaspora* referred to an historical phenomenon: the dispersion of the Jews across the world.

In the beginning, the Jews of Judea and Samaria were chased from Palestine by a conjuration of violence and political constraints. In 722 [B.C.E.], Israel, the Kingdom of the North, fell to the power of Babylon; in 586 [B.C.E.], the Kingdom of Judea succumbed in its turn.

A part of the population submitted to deportation, drawing from its unhappiness the hope of a return under the leadership of a hero chosen by God so as to help his people, sanctified by ordeals.

The realities of the situation, however, had the upper hand over the tortuous designs of Providence. Many exiled Jews — little concerned with regaining their homeland because they were lodged in comfortable places — created communities, practiced their cult, instaurated among them a politics of mutual assistance in which the affluent supported the poorest.

Thus, the first Diaspora began as a voluntary movement of dispersion. It accented itself after the conquest by Alexander, when Palestine — inserted into the Greek world — participated in its intense commercial activity. The Jews thus propagated themselves in regions that were subjected to Ptolemy and the Seleucideans, of whom they were the subjects.

To the communities long since installed in Egypt and Babylon were added those of Syria, Asia Minor, and soon the entire Greco-Roman Empire.

The second Diaspora extended from the Second Century before the Christian era to the beginning of 135 [C.E.], when Hadrian's crushing of the revolt of Bar Kochba marked the beginning of a third and dramatic exodus. The flame of persecution, revived by the relapses of Judaism that were embodied by the Greco-Roman Christians of the Second Century and the Catholics of the Fourth Century, would consume the Jews all the way to the Twentieth Century.

In the course of the Second Century before the Christian era, the Asmonean dynasty cemented diplomatic relations with Rome, where the Jewish communities were multiplying.

"One would not easily find," wrote Strabon, who lived from 58(?) to 25(?) B.C.E., "a spot on the inhabited world that hasn't given asylum to these people and that isn't mastered by them." And Agrippa, in a letter to Caligula, wrote: "Jerusalem is the metropolis not only of the country of Judea, but of many others due to the colonies that it has sent out, according to the occasion, in neighboring countries, [including] Egypt, Phoenicia, many parts of Asia, as far away as Bythinia, equally in Europe, Thessaly, Beotia and Macedonia."[25]

As in the majority of the great towns of South Gaul, there were Jews in Lyon, where, mixed with Christians of the New Prophecy, they were the victims of the pogroms of 177.

The statuettes in baked earth that caricatured Jews with circumcised phalluses — which attest to the presence in Treves, around 275, of a quite ancient community — were intended to stir up anti-Semitism.

[25] J. Eisenberg, *Histoire du peuple juif*, Paris, 1974, p. 174.

The Jewish implantations in the towns explains the urban character of Judeo-Christianity and the Hellenized and de-judaicized Christianities that succeded them. Thus the insulting qualification *goyim,* which designated non-Jews (non-believers), would be applied to the anti-Semitic Christians of the Second Century because of the towns' scorn for the conservatism of the countryside, through the use of terms such as *pagani,* "peasants," "hicks," "bumpkins," and, in French, pagans. (Without scruple, historians have adopted the scorn that monotheism nourished with respect to polytheism, by speaking of pagans and paganism.)

Among the population of the Roman Empire, Jews constituted 7 to 10 percent of the total, [which was] around six million people, a number that exceeded the number of inhabitants in Judea.

In the First Century of the Christian era, the Jewish colony in Rome numbered 40,000 to 50,000 people; it possessed fifteen synagogues in which there often grew rival sects, Sadduceans, Pharisaians, Essenes, Nazarenes, Ebionites, Naasenes, Sethians and converts to Judaism from all nationalities, a diversity in which the Zealot movement and its terroristic struggle against the Romans would introduce trouble.

For six centuries, the propagation of Judaism appeared to be a form of conquest. In a difference from future epochs, which were headed for a decrease, a very active proselytism multiplied the adepts among the dominant classes as well as in the disadvantaged milieus. Excited by monotheistic intransigence, by incessant nationalistic and extremist revolts, the hostility of the State was accentuated under Tiberias and culminated in the sacking of Jerusalem in 70 and the annihiliation of the Jewish nation in 135.

Nevertheless, four centuries later, the political principle of monotheism — "One God, One State, One Nation" — would seduce Roman power at the end of a long evolution that would see the Jews despoiled of the sacred texts by the Greco-Roman Christianities, which were themselves for the most part excluded from the Roman and Byzantine Churches, whose reign began in Nicaea in 325 [C.E.]

Jewish Proselytism and Anti-Semitism

The Bible of the Septante [the Seventy], the Greek version of the sacred texts, formed the iron lance of Jewish proselytism in the Greco-Roman Empire. It responded to a will for opening to the world of the *goyim*; Pharisaism expressed it first, before pitting itself against the modernism of certain Judeo-Christian sects that, not content to reject the sacrifices and priests of the Temple (as Essenism did), put into question the hair-splitting rituals of Mosaic law and especially circumcision, which was a major obstacle to conversion.

Jewish orthodoxy wasn't deceived; it held the Greek translation to be a betrayal of the spirit and the letter [of the law].

With the Bible of the Septante, a civilization dominated by commercial capitalism seized hold of an agrarian civilization, which was walled up in its immobility and its mythical thought. Here began the despoilation of the Jewish nation's sacred writings. Did not the apologist Justin affirm around 160 that these texts had ceased to belong to the Jews because they were no longer comprehended by them? For the first time, Adonai became *Kyrios,* the Savior; Joshua was transformed into Jesus; and *Messiah* became *Christos,* Christ.

To the extent that Hellenized Judaism distanced itself from the Judean tradition — a tendency that anti-Judean Essenism clearly prepared — Pharisaism, the only orthodox Jewish sect that survived the disaster of 70 [C.E.] — to engage a movement of falling back on the traditional biblical corpus,

the *Talmud.* Attacked from all sides, the Pharisian community took refuge in a defensive attitude; it surrounded itself with dogmatic ramparts, but not without opening the great window of Kabbala for the cosmic visions of Gnosticism.

Hellenized Judaism was easily rooted in Samaria, where the old refusal of YHWH still smoldered. From the Kingdom of the North would radiate the Baptist Dunstan/Dosithee, Nazorism, Essenism, and the philosophy of Simon, "father of all heresies."

Alexandria, the hot-bed of erudition and curious spirits, possessed an important Jewish colony. Greek anti-Semitism occasionally released upon it ferocious pogroms. It was a crucible in which mixed and clashed the most diverse opinions. Here there gushed — alongside a powerful Hermetic current that brewed the mysteries of Egypt — apologetic texts such as the *Letter from Atistee,* the *Fourth Book of the Maccabees,* Flavius Joseph's *Against Apius,* the work of Philo (who lived around 20 [B.C.E.] to 50 [C.E.]), in which Judaic faith absorbed Greek wisdom and was absorbed by it.

Even if Philo kept to the heart of Jerusalem, a metropolis and spiritual homeland, his conception and language were Greek. Philosopher of the Diaspora, he threw the seeds of Judaism on the foreign soils where there abounded the stones of anti-Semitism and where anti-Judean Essenism had already been confused with Judeo-Christianity.

From the beginning of the First Century, the idea of a renewed and Mosaic-law-renewing Judaism coincided with the dynamism of a market in full expansion, where the racketeering of the Diaspora assisted and by turns competed with the places of Greek and Roman business.

"For a merchant," Josy Eisenberg wrote, "to be or become Jewish is the assurance of easily establishing business relations in a number of countries, to benefit from a warm welcome and great hospitality. For the poor, belonging to Judaism can represent the guarantee of assistance and regular aid [...] There are in Alexandria shipowners and bankers of great Jewish fortunes. But to consider the entirety of the Empire, the Jewish population includes a majority of people of small means. There are many slaves among them. To Rome, neither the Trastevere nieghborhood, nor those of the Capere Port and Subure can pass for distinguished. What one most often reproaches the Jews for is not being sewn from gold, but rather being in tatters and sordid."[26]

Around the beginning of the Third Century, the historian Dion Cassius (155–235 [C.E.]) asked himself about the phenomenon of Jewish expansion: "From whence comes this denomination? I do not know; but it comes from all men, even those issued from other peoples, who follow the law of the Jews. This species even exists among the Romans. Many times repressed, they have always mended their forces and ended up conquering the right to freely practice their customs." For Dion Cassius — and this two hundred years after the supposed birth of Christianity — no notable difference existed between Pharisaians and Marcionite Christians, Christians of the New Prophecy, Valentinian Christians, Naasseans, Sethians and Gnostics of all types.

The discredit that attached to many of the ancient and modern cults that were practiced in the Empire, the honors rendered to God as well as to despots, which offered the spectacle of the Jews' degeneration and flavored their bloody caprices with their usual powerlessness to impose a politics coherent with the State, a derision contrasting with the protestations of austerity and patriotic grandeur — all [of this] incited nostalgia for a unity in which religious faith seconded the fervor of the citizenry, the charm of mystery allied with calculating reason, thereby ordering a new marriage of the heavens and earth, uniting audacious and mercantile modernity with the prudent virtues of agrarian conservatism.

[26] *Ibid.,* p. 163.

Jewish monotheism exactly proposed the principle of a unity founded on a community practice dominated by solidarity. The businessmen as well as the poor classes of the towns discovered a communal interest. The high birth-rate — justified by the fact that not having children "reduces the image of God" — , after having favored emigration from Palestine, worked in favor of the rapid demographic growth of the Jewish colonies, of which the social and economic power grew.

"Even in the masses," noted Flavius Joseph in the First Century, "there had long been a vivid desire for our religion, and there isn't a single Greek or barbarian town into which has not penetrated the practice of the Seventh Day [the Sabbath], during which one rests and observes fasting and the usage of candles, and many of our alimentary prescriptions."[27]

It is, nevertheless, on the reef of complex rituals that the proselytism of the Jews would run aground. Their intransigence proceeded from a conservatism that was irreconciliable with the Greco-Roman mindset. The history of Judeo-Christian and early Christian sects articulated itself according to the incessant visions of Jewish monotheism and Messianism, as dictated by the nostalgia for a State-ified God, strong with obedience from the nations.

Attractive due to its unitary doctrine, the Jewish religion irritated [others] by its intolerance and fanaticism. The destruction of the monuments of other cults in the name of YHWH's disapproval of idolatry stirred up scandal and the racial hatred of the pogroms.

From the First Century onwards, everywhere that Jewish communities installed themselves, incidents and conflicts did not delay in exploding.

In 19 [C.E.], Tiberias, who reigned from 14 to 38, took as pretext the troubles in Rome caused by "three extravagant devoted Jews and a great woman converted to Judaism" to prohibit the Judaic cult in Rome and the entirety of Italy. Following Mommsen, "those who did not consent to publicly repudiate their faith and throw the sacred vessels into the fire were chased from Italy, unless one did not judge them suitable for military service; they were thus incorporated into the disciplined companies, but their religious scruples led a great number of them [to be brought] before the counsels of war."[28]

Rome, which had up to 19 observed with respect to Judaism the tolerance applied to other religions, suddenly used anti-Semitism as a distraction from the real or imaginary menace that the frequency of Palestinian rebellions propagated in the Latium [central Italy]. Without doubt, the repression inaugurated by Tiberias was not foreign to the decision of the evangelical novelists to situate the historical existence of Jesus under his reign.

When Gaius, Tiberias' successor, stirred up the great pogrom in Alexandria in 38, Philo did not hesitate in his *In Flaccum* to castigate the passivity of Flaccus and Roman power, which had favored the Greek party, superior in numbers to the Jews.

In a letter dated 41, Emperor Claudius threatened the Jews of Alexandria with chastisement if they did not renounce their subversive schemes. He accused them of "fomenting a communal nuisance to the entire universe."

In 49, this same Claudius chased the Jews from Rome because they had provoked trouble there. In 64, taking the burning of Rome as a pretext, Nero organized a pogrom that official Catholic history would later present as the first persecution of the Christians.

[27] *Ibid.,* p. 165.

[28] Th. Mommsen, *Histoire romaine,* Paris, 1863–1872.

Hatred for the Jews grew after the insurrection in Palestine, which ended the long guerrilla warfare of the Zealots. "In the neighboring Greek towns — Damascus, Cesarea, Askelon, Skytopolis, Nippos and Gadava — the Greeks massacred the Jews. In Damascus 10,500 to 18,000 Jews were put to death."[29]

Other pogroms would take place in Alexandria, Antiochus and Pella. All of the persecutions of the First Century, which the Catholics registered in their martyrologies with a view towards accrediting their long history, were in fact pogroms. The refusal to "sacrifice to the idols," so frequently recalled in hagiographical legends, belonged properly to Jewish religious obstinacy. By 38, Philo of Alexandria would intercede with the Emperor in favor of the Jews who refused to render homage to his statue. Up to the Third Century, the catacombs would serve as the sepulcher and refuge of the Jews and several truly Naasean Gnostics, whom the imperial power hemmed in without distinction.

* * *

Most frequently, the reproaches addressed to the Jews by Roman moralists emphasized impiety, which was alleged due to the absence of priests, and immorality, a traditional accusation with respect to occult communities that were poorly known or had escaped from the control of the State. Celse left no doubt in his *True Discourse*: "These people who have neither priests nor altars are identical to the atheists; living in closed communities, they have, one supposes, dissolute morals." Celse here recalls the "orgiastics," persecuted in 42 [B.C.E.] by the Empire, in which they constituted secret groups and revived the tradition of the Dionysiac cults. The same argument would later serve the Church many times in its condemnations of heretics.[30]

Furthermore, the Zealots' guerrilla warfare contributed to the vulgarization of the image of the "Jew with a knife between his teeth," which the anti-Semitism of the Twentieth Century would regurgitate, unaware that it originated with the Pharisain Jew Flavius Joseph, friend of the Romans, for whom the Zealots were *letoi,* bandits, hired killers or "knife-wielding killers."

The stupidity of Greco-Roman anti-Semitism did not cede anything — not that this would surprise us — to the ignominy of its modern resurgence. The poet Horace (65–8) was irritated by seeing his friend Fuscus convert to Judaism, observe the Sabbath and refuse to "turn his nose up at circumcised Jews."

Petrone (10–66) made fun of them by assuring his readers that the Jews adored a Pig-God and rendered thanks to the head of an ass.[31] If the Pig-God renders ironic the prohibition on [eating] pork, the mention of a God with the head of an ass doesn't lack interest: such a representation figured in a number of Sethian magical amulettes and confirms the presence in Rome — in the Jewish milieu of the 50s — of a group for which the Messiah was Seth, Son of Man, that is to say, Son of Adam.[32]

For Pline the Elder (28–79), "the Jews are a nation celebrated for their scorn for divinities," and, according to Lysimaque of Alexandria, "Moses exhorted them to not be kind to anyone." Martial (40–104) had recourse to the leitmotif of fantastic frustration, which provided racism with the violence of relief: "You can not even avoid making love with circumcised Jews," he said indignantly, conscious of the peril hanging over Roman virility.

Around 120, Tacitus denounced the decline of the Empire and the corruption of ancestral virtues in his frequent conservations about Judaism with the members of the Roman aristocracy, nay, the

[29]K. Deschner, *Kriminalgeschicte des Christentums,* Hamburg, 1986. I, p.125.

[30]M. Simon, *Recherches d'histoire judeo-chretienne,* Paris, 1962; ID., *La Polemique antijuive* in *Melanges Cumont.*

[31]Petrone, *Satyricon,* fr. 371.

[32]Whittaker, *Jews and Christians,* Cambridge, 1984, p. 82.

familiars of the imperial court. He had an active commiseration with the Jews that contrasts with "the implacable hatred that they arouse in the rest of mankind." He speaks of "execrable superstition" and esteems the Jews to have been "less convicted of having burned Rome than hating humankind."

After the crushing of Bar Kochba by Hadrian and the end of the Jewish nation, the anti-Judaism of the Judeo-Christians changed into anti-Semitism among the Hellenized Christians, as much under the impulse of Marcion, the inventor of Saul/Paul, as under the anti-Marcionites, such as Justin, who would attempt to resemble Rome by alleging his hostility to all forms of Judaism.

"Judaism," writes David Rokeah, "gives way to a replacement product that pursues the conquest of the pagan world. After the Second Century, the activity of the Christian 'mission' would intensify."[33]

When Philostratus affirmed around 230 that "this people have for a long time been in revolt, not only against the Romans, but also against humanity in its entirety. The men who have imagined an unsociable life, which they do not share with their equals, nor [do they share] the table, nor the libations, nor the sacrifices, are further from us than Suse or Bactres,"[34] his remarks could be countersigned by those who would later accuse the Jews of deicide, namely, the fathers of ecclesiastic anti-Semitism: John Chrysostome, Jerome, Athanase and Augustian of Hippone.[35]

* * *

Judaism maintained such a morbid propensity to hold itself responsible for the ordeals of a "just God" that it called forth, in the manner that the masochist solicits the sadist, the donkey's kick that would be delivered after the definitive loss of 135 and that, over the centuries, would martyr the Jews in the name of the love of Christ and a good God. A double forfeiture presided over the birth of Christianity: the despoilation of the Jews' sacred texts and the legend of a sacrificed Messiah whose blood would fall upon them. The bloody irony of what Deschner calls the "criminal history of Christianity" is that Catholicism only ratified the incessant rewriting of Jewish texts by the prophets, the Essenes, the Christian Jews and their *midrashim,* and the hatred of the Esseno-Baptists for Jerusalem, whose priests executed their Master of Justice.

[33]D. Rokeah, *Jews, Pagans, and Christians in Conflict,* Jerusalem-Leiden, 1982.
[34]J. Eisenberg, *op. cit.,* p. 179.
[35]K. Deschner, *op. cit.,* pp. 117 *sq.*

Chapter 3: The Judean Sects

Originally the term "sects" did not carry any perjorative connotation. It designated certain political and religions factions in the general population.

Alexander and Greek domination confirmed the existence of a Samaritan sect, which issued from the separation between the kingdoms of the North and the South. Hellenization encouraged this sect by allowing it to build a temple distinct from the one in Jerusalem. Its members only knew and only recognized the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible) and the *Book of Joshua/Jesus,* in which a sermon by Origen, written in the first half of the Third Century, revealed its influence on the mythic genesis of the Messianic Savior. The Samaritan Bible differed from the Masoretic text, was established latter, and was close to the manuscripts discovered at Qumran.

The Sadduceans

One believes that the sect of the Sadduceans appeared about 300 years before the Christian era. This sect inscribed itself in the political line of Yahwehist centralism. Pre-dating the exile (586–536 [B.C.E.]), but actually drafted in the Fourth Century [B.C.E.], the *Book of Ezekiel* describes priests who conformed to the Sadducean belief in the Son of Sadoq (or Tsadoq). Combining the role of prophet and the function of the sacerdote, Ezekiel unified in the same ministry two religious attitudes that had often been opposed: the popular agitator and the temple functionary.

A priest who claimed to have ordained Solomon (Kings 1, 38), Tsadoq evoked the idea of justice according to the Semitic practice of wordplay known as *themoura,* "a Kabbalistic practice by which, on the basis of a logical table of permutations, one replaces one Hebraic letter with another. When applied to Biblical texts, these replacements permit one to multiply the hidden meaning (or what is held to be such)."[36]

Here, the key word is *tsedeq,* "justice," which was used by the Judeo-Christian sect of Melchizedek, Melchitsedeq. One finds it in the Essene cult of the Master of Justice, and in the name they conferred upon themselves, "Sons of Tsadoq," and in the quality of "Just(ness)," ascribed to Jacob, who was later held to be an apostle by the Christian and Catholic evangelical legends.

Sadduceaism comforts the unitary doctrine of the State and monotheism. A sacerdotal ruling class, the Sadducean party built the Temple of Jerusalem, which formed the axis of its temporal power and the privilged space in which God manifested the will to guide his people. High functionaries of the divine judgment, the Sadduceans devoted themselves especially to quarrels concerning precedence and rivalries for power.

Charged with accomplishing the sacrifices of the Temple, and with watching over the observance of the rites with which YHWH folds [*plie*] everyday existence, the Sadduceans were hardly different in mindset from the Prince-Bishops of the Middle Ages and the Rennaissance who, living in opulence

[36] B. Dubourg, *L'Invention de Jesus,* Paris, 1987, I, p. 266

and debauchery, only protested their faith so as to better assure the prerogatives of the Church and its sacred authority.

Good wardens, the Sadduceans assimilated revolt into change, and apostasy into prophetic proclamations. All the more attached to their privileges, which they prided themselves on and allowed them access to an all-powerful God, the Sadduceans didn't hesitate to collaborate with the invaders or to ferociously repress the Jews who didn't accommodate themselves.

The Pharisaians treated the Sadduceans like they were Epicureans, which the Pharisians thought to be an insulting term. The Christians accused the Sadduceans of not believing in anything, a reproach that — by a malicious turn of events — Celse and his contemporaries addressed to the Christians, with whom (as late as the Second Century) they still confused with the Orthodox Jews who had disappeared in the aftermath of 70 [C.E.]. The Sadduceans, it is true, rejected the three great Pharisaian doctrines that were later reprised by the Christians: the expectation of a Messiah; the immortality of the soul, and — evoked for the first time in the *Book of Daniel* in 165 [B.C.E.] — the resurrection of the body.

The Sadduceans' support of Antiochus IV Epiphane's politics of Hellenization and the pillaging of the Temple and the massacre of the factions hostile to the Greek party, followed two years later by the instauration in Jerusalem of the cult of the Olympian Jupiter, revived a popular nationalist and religious upheaval that was led by a certain Mattathias. The movement partook of great prophetic agitations that required a strict obedience to Mosiac law by everyone.

Killed in 166 [B.C.E.], Mattathias was succeded by his son, Juda, surnamed Maccabee. Under his lead, the rebellion grew and in 164 [B.C.E.] forced Antiochus IV Epiphane to abrogate the measures taken against religion. Despite the amnesty and the re-establishment of the cult, Juda pursued the combat against the occupiers. As his prosecution also struck the partisans of Hellenism, his fanaticism alienated him from a faction of the Jews sensible to the freedoms of Greek thought and the cogency of rational critique. The death of Juda in 160 [B.C.E.], during the course of combat, brought forth a pitiless repression.

The ascension to power by Jean Hyrcan the First (134–104 [B.C.E.]) marked the beginning of the Asmonean dynasty. Hyrcan made himself idious to the Samaritans by seizing their country. He destroyed the Temple on Mount Garizim; he annexed Idum to the south of Judea and Judaized cosmopolitan Galilee. His son Aristobule succeeded him, but died a year later, in 103 [B.C.E.]. His widow married Alexander Jannee (103–76 [B.C.E.]), who arrogated for himself the title of king.

According to Flavius Joseph, a new party intervened in the quarrel between pontifical and monarchial power — the old quarrel between the temporal and the spiritual. Pharisaism confronted the Sadducean sect, which thanks to an alliance with the despots of the day had maintained in its privileges.

The Pharisians pronounced themselves against the attribution of the royal title to Alexander Jannee. He soon therefater crucified 800 Pharisians; the throats of their women and children were cut before his eyes.

From the same tormented matrix would come a third sect, that of the Sons of Tsadoq, or the Men of the Community, whom the Greeks called the "Essenes." Hostile to the Sadduceans and to the Pharisians, they also showed a violent opposition to Jerusalem, the Temple and the practice of sacrifices.

Collaborators with all of the occupiers of Palestine, the Sadduceans did not survive the war of the Zealots, which ended with the sacking of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple in 70 [C.E.]. At the end of the First Century, only the Pharisians possessed a monopoly on Jewish orthodoxy.[37]

[37] M. Simon, *Les sectes juives a l'epoque de Jesus,* Paris, 1960; E.M. Laperrousaz, *L'Attente du messie,* Paris.

The Pharisians

The Hebraic term *peroushim* means "separated, placed apart," an allusion to the schism that would, in 163 [B.C.E.], lead to nationalist and holy war against the Greek occupiers by Mattathias and his son, Juda Maccabee. Better known by their Hellenized name "Pharisians," these sectarians extolled the strict observance of Mosaic law and opposed Sadducean hypocrisy with working-class fervor.

Vituperating the dissolute morals of the sacerdotal caste, Pharisaism — precursor of a reform movement that castigated the morals of the Roman Church — celebrated the virtues of aesthetic morality, emphasized the importance of solidarity, encouraged piety and rallied a crowd of oppressed people, whose feelings of frustration, disorder and envy it channeled.

In its struggle against Sadducean domination, Pharisaism disposed of two institutional weapons that proved its power of organization: the Rabbinat and an assembly of the faithful, or synagogue, the model for future churches.

Whatever his trade, the *rabbi* ("my master"), a secular pedagogue, dispensed religious instruction among the working classes. After the defeat of 70 [C.E.] and the disappearance of Sadduceanism, there were rabbis who imposed modernity on the Jewish religion, fixed the canon of sacred texts, defended orthodoxy, condemned the heresies of the *minim* (dualists or Gnostics) and the *noisrim* or Nazarenes.

The "synagogues," from the Greek *synagoge,* "meeting," designated the houses of priests, studies and meetings. The Essenes would imitate the synagogues by calling theirs "communities," in Greek *ekklesiai,* or, in French, "church" for the place, and "Church" for the assembly.

When bloody repression by Alexander Jannee put them down in 100 [B.C.E.], a large number of Pharisians would leave Judea and go to Galilee. There they were rivals with the Nazarenes in the second half of the First Century *before* the Christian era. In the cities of the Diaspora, their influence would not cease to grow before the great anti-Semitic waves of 70 and 135.

When Pompei seized Jerusalem in 63 [B.C.E.], thereby inaugurating a Roman domination that would perpetuate itself until 324, the Pharisians chose to collaborate with the occupiers.

In the same period, under the pontificate of Jean Hyran II, a dissident Rabbi, the head of an Essene community and known by the name Master of Justice, was put to death with the consent of the Pharisians, if not their instigation. The Essenes vowed against the Pharisians a hatred equal to that which they heaped upon [*accablent*] the Sadduceans and Judaism in general. Not only would the execution of the Christ or Essene Messiah lend its dramatic aura to the crucification of Jesus as reported by the evangelical legends, but it would also accredit the opinion of a death reclaimed by the Pharisians.

* * *

Although little taken with kings chosen by the Romans (such as Herod the Great), the Pharisians estimated that sovereigns govern by reason of a divine will and they supported the principle that it was necessary "to render unto Ceasar what belongs to Ceasar."

The Pharisians took the side of Rome in the struggle against the Zealots, [so much so] that one of their most celebrated sectarians, the historian Flavius Joseph, called them *lestoi,* "bandits," [and] "terrorists." Isn't it with the consent of the Roman authorities that, a little before the destruction of Jerusalem, the great rabbi Johanan Ben Zakai and the Pharisians left the city? The exodus, voluntarily undertaken so as to avoid a confrontation of which the Pharisians disapproved, would in a falsified version enter into the apologetic novel known as *Acts of the Apostles* (end of the Second Century); in it, the Pharisians have transformed themselves into Christians, thus credited with nourishing no

hostility towards Rome (from the second half of the Second Century on, the politics of the diverse Christianities strove to obtain a diploma of good citizenship from Roman imperial power). They took refuge in Pella, in Macedonia. Like the Sadduceans, the Pharisians made a pact with the powers-that-be so as to better situate their religion above terrestrial contingencies. The Catholic Church would not do otherwise all the way through the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. On the other hand, the Pharisians drew down the hatred and scorn of the Zealots and the Essene factions that were favorable to them.

* * *

Pharisaism popularized the practice of *midrash* or biblical commentary. The so-called sacred texts had been re-copied and revised without scruple as a function of on-going polemics, read in public, explained, glossed, corrected by the evolution of mindsets, brought up to date, nay, suppressed, like the *Book of Tobias.* A whole literature — *targum, midrash, mishna, Talmud* — was thus forged in the fires of the assemblies and the necessity of extracting from these texts a moral rule applicable to the community, or to the entirety of the believers.

The Pauline current, which Marcion would impose around 140 [C.E.] so as to counter the Judeo-Christian communities that claimed Peter and John for themselves, took a large part of its doctrine from Pharisian doctrines: notably, the beyond where the dead would be individually resuscitated after a Last Judgment that would divide all into the blessed, raised up to a celestial Eden, and the damned, hurled [down] into Gehenna; the existence of angels, agents and interceders of Divine Grace; the end of the world, in which a Messiah, sent by God, annihilates the terrestrial kingdoms, so as to substitute the Kingdom of God for them; and the imminence of the times in which the power of the Savior will be revealed.

Like the Essenes, the Pharisians practiced the Holy Communion or eucharistic banquet, but they defended a more personal religion, less austere, better accorded with human weakness. Although attached to sacrifices and to the fussy rigors of the observances, they showed themselves much more accommodating, calling forth the reproach of laxity from the Essenes, who themselves refused the sacrifices of the Temple, so as to substitute for them the sacrifice of existence and the maceration of the body.

The Pharisians showed themselves to be ardent proselytizers but, unlike the Essenes, Nazarenes and Elchasaite Christians mentioned in a letter from Pliny the Younger to Tarjan, they were rather inclined to discourage neophytes. Another paradox: like the Christian Jews in the *Epistle attributed to Barnabas* (90? 100? 110?), they did not raise objections to circumcision, the Sabbath, the rites of purification or prohibited foods.

Placing the accent on an active solidarity, the Pharisians made the synagogues places of mutual assistance and encounter. They developed in them in a kind of social security, providing assistance to the poor, the elderly, widows and the sick. The Judeo-Christian, then de-Judaized Churches reclaimed for their own accounts the charitable politics of the Pharisians, betting on them so as to implant themselves more easily in the working-class [*populaire*] milieux.

The *Zealot* Movement

The Zealots constituted less a sect, properly speaking, than a front for a nationalist guerrilla war that re-grouped (in a communal hatred for the Roman occupation) diverse religious tendencies in Palestine and across the Diaspora.

The king from 37 to 4 [B.C.E.], Herod did not fail to re-build the Temple, appease religious scruples and be assured of the favor of the Sadducean and Pharisian parties. Nevertheless, an agitation that no doubt issued from the Essene and Baptist milieux (Dositheans and Nazarenes) ravaged the State.

Speaking of the revolt of Juda of Gamala, Flavius Joseph mentions a bandit by the name of Ezechias: "There was also a certain Juda, son of Ezechias, the redoutable head of the brigands who had only been taken by Herod with the greatest of difficulties."[38]

Juda of Gamala or Galilee was the leader of the revolt in the year 6. The crucification of his father, Ezechias, took place around 30 [B.C.E.].

The endemic state of the revolt became worse after the death of Herod in 4 [B.C.E.]. "Troubles exploded from all sides of the country [...] A slave of the deceased king assumed the diadem and, traveling the region with the brigands whom he had assembled, burned the royal palace at Jericho, among many of the luxurious residences."[39] A shephard, Athrongee, also assumed the diadem and traveled the countryside, killing Romans and the King's people. Then, the Roman General Varus was sent with two legions and four regiments of cavalrymen.

In 6, the census organized by Quirinus, the papal legatee of Syria, gave the signal for a general insurrection that was conducted for religious reasons, because "only God can take account of his people" (which is how the census is mentioned by David in the *Book of Samuel* 2, 24), but was stirred up everywhere by the miserable lot of the excluded classes. The insurrection was led by Juda of Gamala, to whom Flavius returns several times:

> Then, a Galilean by the name of Juda pushed his compatriots to revolt by reproaching them for agreeing to pay taxes to the Romans and for supporting *mortal masters, beyond God* ...[40]
>
> There was also *a certain Juda, son of Ezechias,* the redoutable leader of the brigands, who had only been taken by Herod with the greatest of difficulties. This Juda united around Sepphoris, *in Galilee,* a troop of desperate people who made an incursion against the Royal Palace. Being in possession of all the weapons that they found there, he equipped those who surrounded him and carried off all of the riches that he had collected. He terrorized the neighboring areas with raids and pillaging, aiming to take a great fortune and *even the honors of royalty,* because he hoped to attain this dignity, not by the practice of virtue, but by the excess of his injustice...[41]
>
> But a certain Juda the Gaulonite from the city of Gamala joined with a Pharisian named Saddok, and participated in the sedition. They claimed that this *Census* provided nothing less than complete servitude, and they called upon the people to reclaim their liberty. They said, if it should happen that they succeeded, this would be to the benefit of the fortune they'd already acquired, and if they were frustrated by the goods that remained

[38] Flavius Joseph, *Antiquites judaiques,* XVII, 10.
[39] Flavius Joseph, *La Guerre des Juifs,* II, 4, 5.
[40] *Ibid.,* II, 18.
[41] Flavius Joseph, *Antiquites judaiques,* XVII, 10.

> for them to take, at least they would obtain the honor and glory of having shown the grandeur of the soul. Moreover, God preferred the success of their projects; so, in love with great things, they spared no expense in realizing it…
>
> Here were born seditions and political assassinations, sometimes of enemies, sometimes fellow citizens, immolated by the passion that animated them to fight one against the other and to never cede to their adversaries; the famine pushed them to the most shameless extremities; the seizure and destruction of cities, up to the last revolt in which even the Temple of God was surrendered to the fire of the enemy. The change in and upset of the national institutions had so much influence that those who attained them were lost, such as Juda of Gamala and Saddok, who introduced and aroused among us a *fourth philosophical sect* and surrounded themselves with many adherents, and immediately filled the country with troubles and planted the roots of the evil that would much later rage in it, and this thanks to this unknown philosophy of which I have wanted to speak a little, principally because it was *the youth's interest in this sect* that was the ruin of the country.
>
> The fourth philosophical sect had Juda the Galilean as its author. His sectarians in general accorded themselves with the doctrine of the Pharisians, but they also have an invincible love of liberty, because they judge that *God is the only chief and the only master.* The most extraordinary forms of death, the torture of parents and friends leave them indifferent, provided that they do not call any man by the name of master. As many people have witnessed the unshakable firmness with which they submit to all of these evils, I can say no more, because I fear, not that one doubts what I have said about this subject, but on the contrary that my words do not give too weak of an idea of the scorn with which they accept and support sorrow. This madness began to rage in our people under the government of Gessius Florus, who by the excess of his violence will cause them to revolt against the Romans. Such are the philosophical sects that exist amongst the Jews…[42]

Flavius Joseph's text calls for several remarks. The movement of the Zealots or "zealous servants of the law of Moses" was not born under the government of Gessius Florus, that is to say, in 65; it took place in the form of Juda of Gamala, called the Galilean, just like the Messiah Jesus, who also wanted to become King of the Jews, of whose existence [Flavius] Joseph is ignorant.

The name of the Pharisian, Sadoq, which Flavius Joseph (himself a Pharisian) held in mediocre esteem, evokes the idea of justice, which was shared by the Essenes' Master of Justice and the Judeo-Christians' Jacob/John. Finally, the regrouping of diverse religious tendencies that the historian calls the "fourth sect" — does it not suggest the idea of a religious syncretism in which each combatant, not recognizing any authority other than that of God, is the brother of and model for Adonai, *Kyrios,* the Savior?

In 45, Caspius Fadus — named the governor of Judea by Emperor Claude — had to face an insurrection led by the Messiah Theudas (aka Juda or Thomas), who was followed by a great many poor people. In the manner of Elie and Elisee in Hebraic mythology, he promised his troops they would take Jerusalem and cross the Jordan without getting their feet wet. By promising to lead his flock into the promised land, he repeated the gesture of Joshua. Fadus suppressed the revolt. Theudas was decapitated, his partisans massacred.

[42] *Ibid.,* XVIII, 1.

Between 46 and 48, Tiberias Alexander, who succeeded Fadus, ordained the crucification of the two sons of Juda of Gamala: Simeon (Simon) and his brother Jacob (John).

Under Agrippa III, around 49, new clashes broke out between Jews and Zealots. Battles were fought beside the Temple. In 66, Cesaria was the theatre of battle between Jews and Greeks. Two years later, an incident brought fire to the powder. Eleazar, son of the great priest Anania and leader of the Temple's guards, killed the third son or the grandson of Juda of Galilee, Menachem, one of the leaders of the Zealot movement (his name means "Paraclete" [in Greek] and "Comforter" [in Latin]). The general war against Rome and for the independence of Israel were proclaimed in a great confusion, because Jews from rival factions killed each other in Jerusalem. It would last up to 70 [C.E.].

Flavius Joseph, who had been governor of Galilee, said with full knowledge of the causes of the Vespasian campaign:

> After the taking of Jopata, all of the Galileans who had escaped from the arms of the Romans surrendered to them. The rebels then occupied everywhere, except for Gischala and Mount Itabyrios (Thabor). They also occupied Gamala, the city of the Taricheans, situated above the lake, where the kingdom of Agrippa ended, and their neighbors were Sogone and Seleucie and Lake Semechonitis. The lake's width is sixty verstes and extends to the market town called Daphne, which is completely beautiful and has access to sources of water originating in the Little Jordan, flowing under the Temple of the Golden Cow (one of the golden cows of Jeroboam: I Kings 12, 29), before reaching the Great Jordan. By deputizing these places and giving them his faith, Agrippa has pacified them.
>
> But Gamala did not submit, counting on its solidity, because the soil was rocky and the town stood straight up on a buttress, as [a head] on a neck and shoulders, and thus had the appearance of a camel. Thus it was called *Gamal,* but the people of the country did not call it by its real name, *Kamil* (the Galilean pronounciation of *Gamal*) because they detested this animal (in Greek, *Kamelos*).
>
> On its flank and in front, there were depthless precipices; behind, it was not very fortified, but the inhabitants had reinforced it with a deep ditch. As far as dwellings, they had been built extremely closely together at the center, and there were shafts bored through, all the way to the end of the city.

As strong as the place was, Flavius Joseph had it fortified even more by constructing solid ramparts and establishing conduits and tunnels, so that one could also circulate under the ground.[43]

Situated to the east of Lake Toberiade (Genesareth), Gamala — despite its privileged situation — fell into the hands of Titus, son of Vespasian, at the cost of difficult fighting.

In August 70, the Roman *Decima Legio*[44] seized Jerusalem, sacked it and ruined the Temple. The Zealots' desperate resistance was sustained until the fall of Masada, their last fortress, in 73.

In the first half of the Second Century, the revolt broke out again under the leadership of the Messiah Bar Kochba. Hadrian crushed him in 135, reducing the Jewish nation and state to inexistence for nineteen centuries.

* * *

[43] Flavius Joseph, *La Guerre des Juifs,* II, 11.

[44] *Translator's note*: in Latin: the Tenth Legion.

If Flavius Joseph speaks of the Zealots as if they were a single sect, it is because the insurrection had been lived like a veritable national and religious epic, a saga of which the scattered fragments nourished the *midrashim* of anger, despair and eschatology, before being revised and faultily translated into Greek and implanted into the recitations of Christian, and then Catholic propaganda, which distorted the meaning.

Jews of all beliefs were among the Zealots. A Hellenized aristocrat, Flavius Joseph — a functionary of the Roman Empire — reproached them [the Zealots] for their violence and fanaticism. (The fire that ravaged Rome in 64 [C.E.] and to which Nero's pogroms responded was the work of the hardcore of Zealots who were active in Rome's Jewish community. In 49, troubles attributed to the Jews had exploded in Rome. Supposing that it isn't an interpolation, the formula "*impulsatore Christo*" appears in 130, in Suetone's *Life of the Twelve Caesars*: "on the incitement of a Messiah," *chrestos* or *christos* translating simply the Hebrew *messiah*.) With xenophobia and nationalist messianism helping out, the religious tendencies amalgated themselves into an apparent unity, from which Judeo-Christianity would draw a kind of specificity after the defeat [of 70 A.D.].

Pharisaism expressed the hope for salvation, the imminent end of the world, the approach of the Last Judgment, and the resurrection.

Despite the pacifism with which one generally credits them, the Essenes participated in the Zealot movement. The *Decima Legio* would raze the site of Qumran. Among the texts discovered at Masada — in addition to the *Wisdom of Jesus ben Sira* — was a specifically Essene ritual, [namely] the Sabbath prayer [sung] in union with the angels of heaven.[45]

What about the Judeo-Christian presence of the Ebionite or Nazarean type? The works of Flavius Joseph mention many names that also appear in the exegetical and propagandistic literature, popping up in the Hebrew or Aramaic *midrashim* of the First Century, and the Catholic texts of the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Centuries. It thus seems that, due to the ahistorical spirit of Judaism, the two Zealot leaders, Jacob/John and Simon, son of Juda of Gamala, [respectively] "assumed" to be Jacob of Kepher Schanya, leader of the Nazarean community, executed between 41 and 42 on the orders of Herod Agrippa, and Simon the Essene, enemy of Jochanaan, also called John the Baptist. The first of the two would later become John the Just and the second Simon/Peter, descended from Simon Cephas (Simon the Rock, Simon the Pebble, Simon the Bald, Simon the Cruel, Simon the Unshakable?).

The agitator Theudas contains the *doublon*[46] Jude/Judas and Thomas. The evangelical legends call him/them/it "Athlete" (according to the Essene expression "fighters of virtue") and "father of the Savior." The four names would enter into the future recollections of the apostles chosen for patronage of the diverse communities. Around the end of the Second Century, the reassembling of the [original] apostles would put together a team of heroes on which only Joshua/Jesus has no existence outside of the Hebraic mythology.

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It would not be without interest to mention Brandon's thesis, in which Jesus was a Zealot put to death along with other brigands or *lestoi*. Saul/Paul, an adversary of the communities or churches that claimed John and Simon/Peter for themselves, erected him as the exemplary value of his [Saul/Paul's] sauteriological and peniteniary system. So as to please Rome, he substituted for the terrorist a saint put to death, not by the Romans, but by the Jews, who would not pardon him, nor his pacifism, nor the

[45] Y. Yadin, *The Ben Sira Scroll from Masada,* Jerusalem, 1965.

[46] *Translator's note*: this French word can mean a two-sided coin, a "doubloon," or a typographic double.

ecumenism of his God of Kindness. These were the fictions that, through the Twentieth Century, took up the slack for the canonical Gospels so as to disparage the status of a historical Jesus that would have accorded growing credit to the Zealot hypothesis, which supposed that Jesus was the father of John and Simon, and thus the son of Juda of Gamala. (One can not fail to cite one of the two remarks that do not conform with the [image of] the softness of the Messiah and that have subsisted through the composite redaction of the Gospels: "Moreover, bring here my enemies who have not wanted me to reign over them and cut their throats in my presence. After having spoken thus, Jesus put himself at the head of his followers so as to go up to Jerusalem." *Gospel attributed to Luke,* 19, 27–28.)

Although Dubourg's thesis of a biblical Joshua who was incarnated in many prophets confirms the inexistence of a historical Jesus as late as the second half of the Second Century (in 150, a work recognized by all the churches of the epoch as *Pastor attributed to Hermas* does not mention him), it does not exclude the intervention — in the long struggle of dissident Jews against Rome — of a "new Joshua" with whom Theudas/Thomas (much later called the "twin brother of Jesus") might have identified himself.

After 70, Rome imposed the peace of the cemetary on Palestine. The Sadducean aristocracy disappeared; the last Zealot party desperately resisted at Masada. The Samaritans and the Essenes entered the war on the side of the Judeans, were decimated and took refuge in the cities of the Diaspora. Only the Pharisians — friends of Rome and defenders of the peace — escaped the violence of the conquerors, only to fall to the animosity of the vanguished, that is to say, the Esseno-Christians, who themselves fell apart into a multitude of sects that repudiated the bloody God of Israel, contested Mosaic law and rediscovered pacifism, which had been briefly forsaken.

Chapter 4: The Men of the Community, or the Essenes

Only Flavius Joseph and Philo of Alexandria designate the *essenoi* or *essaoi* (from the Hebrew *esah',* "counsel" or "party," and which Dupont-Sommer[47] translates as "congregation" or "men of the community,") as a Jewish dissidence, hostile to the two sects dominating Judea and the Diaspora: Sadduceism and Pharisaism.

Hadot does not exclude the influence of the Aramaic word *ossio,* "doctor," which justifies the appellation Therapeutes, or the "doctors of the soul" whom Philo takes to be an Essene sect located not far from Alexandria.

If one can judge from the manuscripts discovered at Qumran, they called themselves "Men of the Community," "Counsel of God," "Counsel of the Community," "Sons of Sadoq" (or Tsadoq, Sons of the Just, or Sons of Justice). In a general way, they called themselves the "Loyal," or the "Pious," in Hebrew *chasse* (the Syrian *hasaya,* which means "pious" or "holy," is phonetically similar to "Essene"). "The eastern door of Jerusalem, which overlooked the country of the Essenes, conserved the name *Bab Essahioun,* which seems to recall the name of this mysterious community."[48]

According to Qumranian texts from a later date, the Essenes formed the sect of the "New Alliance," a formula that Marcion — in all probability inspired by the Christian Jew Saul — would translate as "New Testament" so as to oppose it to the ancient one, and with a success that cannot be denied.

In two centuries of existence, Essenism — the expansion of which followed the Diaspora — did not fail to borrow from diverse streams and to embrace many doctrines. Philo speaks of the "Therapeutes" from Lake Mareotis. In certain texts, the Men of the Community identify themselves with the *ebbyonim,* the "poor," because there was good reason to reproach the Judeo-Christian sect of the Ebionists, who were close to or rivals with the Nazarenes, and who seemed to oppose themselves to the *rebym,* the "many," a term used by Saul/Paul to designate his disciples.

History of the Sect

Taking exception to the hypothesis that fixes the origin of Essene dissidence under the Asmoneans Jonathan and Simon, Dupont-Sommer situates it under Alexander Jannee (103–76 [B.C.E.]) instead.

The opposition to the monarchal pretentions of the great priest Alexander Jannee incited the leader of the Essenes to withdraw into the desert with his partisans, just as Moses did.

> We know through Flavius Joseph that Aristobule the First, successor to the great priest Jean Hyran, his father, would add the title of king to that of great priest. A year later, in 103 [B.C.E.], his brother Alexander Jannee succeded him and did not disavow the bold

[47] A. Dupont-Sommer, *Les Ecrits esseniens decouverts pres de la mer Morte,* Paris, 1980, p. 408; J. Hadot, *op. cit.* p. 35.
[48] J. Marques-Riviere, *Histoire des sects et des societes secretes,* p. 92.

> initiative: he took the title of king. Of the three great Jewish parties, only the Essene party was strongly opposed to this innovation.[49]

The resolution to leave Jerusalem and enter the desert is evoked in *The Rule of the War of the Sons of the Light Against the Sons of Darkness.*

Where was the community located? The historian Dion Chrysostome (around 42 to 125) speaks of Essenes living near Sodom. For Saulcy, Qumran would be Gomorrah.[50] Doresse is content to affirm: "Sodom and Gomorrah count among the places in which their colonies were established."[51]

In the *Writings of Damascus,* the first master of the sect carried the title of priest. He issued from the sacerdotal family of Gemul and his dissidence derived, at the origin at least, from a power struggle in the Sadducean caste, mythically attached to Sadoq, great priest under Solomon.

His title referred back to the sacred notion of justice, to those just people or saints whom God designated as his chosen, and whom Jacob would perpetuate in Christianity. It was also a reference to the destiny of Melchizedek, a secondary biblical personage, elevated by the symbolic consonance of this name (*tsedek,* "justice") to the dignity of Messiah among certain Essenes. The fragments derived from *midrashim,* reprised in the notes attributed to Saul/Paul, again attest to the veneration shown with respect to an *alter ego* of the Master of Justice.

Around 100 [B.C.E.] there developed in Qumran a Jewish sect that dissented from Sadduceanism and was hostile to the Pharisians, whom Alexander Jannee persecuted. Upon the death of the monarch and great priest, his widow, Alexandra (76–77), occupied the throne and set up her son Hyran II as the sovereign pontiff.

Upon the death of Alexandra, a war opposed Hyran II (67–63) to his brother Aristobule II. The Pharisians arranged themselves on the side of the former, while the Sadduceans chose the latter.

Around 65 [B.C.E.] the persecution of Hyran II fell upon the Essenes who had taken refuge in Damascus, the holy city of which the Hebrew name (DMS) means "sanctuary."[52] Its mythical foundation is attributed to Seth, Son of Man (that is to say, Son of Adam), whose importance — emphasized in the Qumran manuscripts, as in the texts discovered at Nag-Hammadi — demonstrated the existence of the sects holding Seth to be the Messiah. The *Writings of Damascus* situated the event a little before the arrival of Pompei in Judea in 63 [B.C.E.].

Bewteen 65 and 63 [B.C.E.] a drama exploded, the eschatological consequences of which surpass the history of the Essenes: the putting to death of the Master of Justice, who was, according to the *Commentary of Habacuc,* "the priest that God had placed in the (House of Juda) so as to explain all of the words of his servants, the prophets." Is it Onias the Just, put to death in the camp of Hyran II, as suggested by Dupont-Sommers? (According to J.M. Rosenstiehl,[53] the ancient kernel of the *Apocalypse of Elie* dates from the epoch of Hyran II. A king who is not anointed persecutes the virgin Tabitha, who is the Community of Qumran, but the Anointed One, the Messiah, comes to deliver her and leads her to terrestrial paradise. The return of Henoch evokes that of the Master of Justice.)

Whatever the case, the Qumran texts thenceforth opposed the veneration of its victim, the "Last Priest" or the "Messiah of the Spirit," to the execration of the despot or the "Impious Priest." Philonenko

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[49] J. Picard (or de Picardie), "Histoire des bienheureux du temps de Jeremie," in *Pseudoepigraphes de l'Ancien Testament,* p. 34.

[50] Saulcy (Fr. de), *Dictionnaire des antiquites bibliques,* Paris, 1859.

[51] J. Doresse, *Les livres secrets des gnostiques d'Egypte,* Paris, 1958–1959, II, p. 328.

[52] B. Dubourg, *L'invention de Jesus, op. cit.,* II.

[53] J.-M. Rosenstiehl, *L'Apocalypse d'Elie,* Paris, 1972, p. 69.

sees in the martrying of Esaie a transposition of the history of the sect and the sacrificial execution of its Messiah.[54]

When Pompei seized Jerusalem and razed the Temple in 63 [B.C.E.], the Essenes propagated the rumor of a just punishment inflicted by God on the Judeans, guilty of the death of the Messiah. This scenario, which colored anti-Judaism with anti-Semitism, would in the Second Century enter into the romanesque elaboration of the death of Jesus.

Little by little, the Men of the Community regained the region of the Dead Sea, not without leaving important colonies in the cities of the Diaspora and in Damascus, the sanctuary city in which the legendary biography of Saul/Paul situated the ilumination of the prophet and his revelation of the Messiah.

The invasion of Parthes, which ravaged the Qumran region between 40 and 38 [B.C.E.], and an earthquake ruined a secular community of which the numerical importance was attested by the architectural developments of the buildings, the development of culture, the irrigation system and the cemetery, in which [both] men and women reposed.

The tolerant attitude of Herod (37 [B.C.E.] — 4 [C.E.]) favored the Essenes' freedom of movement. They furrowed the roads that, from Jerusalem to the Dead Sea, ran parallel to the Jordan River. Here they manifested an important Baptist movement. Is it necessary to see an evolved Essenism, stripped of its elitism, or the perpetuation of the teachings of the Messiah called Dunstan/Dosithee, crucified, in the Nazareanism implanted in Judea, Galilee and Samaria well before the Christian era?

From 4 [B.C.E.] on, the guerrilla war against Rome provoked a new flow of people into Qumran. It is more than probable that a faction of Essenism furnished doctrinal weapons to the Zealot movement. At Masada there were Essenes for whom *The Rule of the War of the Sons of the Light Against the Sons of Darkness* syncretized eschalatological combat and national[ist] warfare.

In 68, Qumran was devastated by the *Decima Legio Pretensis,* the elite military horde sent by the Romans to crush the Jewish insurrection. The development of Essenism was not broken; beginning with the divine punishment that fell upon Jerusalem and the Temple, which they never ceased to execrate, the Men of the Community showed themselves on the great day of the diaspora to be who they had always been: Messianic Jews expecting the imminent return of their *Kyrios,* their Savior; enlightened ones whom the Greeks at the beginning of the Second Century called *chrestianoi* or *christianoi,* that is to say, quite simply Messianists and not, as the historians have falsely suggested, disciples of a unique Christ.

Contrary to what Renan affirms, Christianity is not an Essenism that succeeded; it is nothing other than the ensemble of Essene sects, encircled by the general term Judeo-Christian, and opposed to Pharisaism.

Spared from Roman repression, the Pharisians tightened their ranks, fell back upon a rigorous canonicity concretized by the Talmud and its commentaries. They fought two heresies: the *nosrim* or Nazarenes, preoccupied with the reform of Mosaic law, and the *minim* or Gnostics, "those who know," in whom the range of the dualists was extended, opposing the Good God and YHWH to the Simonian doctrine of individual salvation through the creation of self.

[54]Philonenko (M.), *Pseudoepigraphes de l'Ancien Testament et des manuscrits de la mer Morte,* Paris, 1987, t. I.

Monachism and Ecclesiastic Organization

Essenism evolved a great deal in two centuries. If its archaic form of the monastic type had not disappeared from the hermitages and Coptic monasteries founded by Pacome and Macaire around 251, under the persecution of Dece, then the doctrine would have taken more modern colorations that were expressed by Ebionism, Nazareanism, the *Epistle attributed to Barnabas,* the teachings of Saul/Paul, nay, the Elchasaitism of the *Homelies of Peter attributed to Clement,* not to mention the Henochians, Melchisedechians and Sethians.

The excavations at Qumran have extracted a square building, flanked by a tower that was perhaps intended to watch for the return of the Messiah, who was put to death around 63 [B.C.E.].

[In the building there was found] a system of feeder channels (a torrent at the beginning), seven bathing pools endowed with stairways and several round basins, reserved for the baptism of neophytes and purifying ablutions.

Dedicated to the cult and to meetings, this monastery did not shelter the members of the Community, who were lodged in the neighborhood. A meeting hall served [as a place for] the reading and exegesis of biblical texts, rewritten and revised without scruple by the sectarians, who were convinced that they were the only ones to hold the truth. Did not they praise their Christ for having revealed to them the meaning of the Scriptures, thus elevating them to the status of chosen by God, saints, "perfect ones"?

Here [in the monastery] were also celebrated the sacred banquets of "Holy Communions," ritual meals of bread and wine (or water) by which the faithful communed with the presence of God (the Catholic eucharist would be inspired by it, as well as by the symbolism of the Flesh and the Blood, borrowed from the Phrygian cult of Attis).

According to the estimates, the average population of Qumran increased to around 200 people. Its autocratic system was founded on agriculture, abandoned to the care of neophytes, while the Perfect Ones devoted themselves to the praise of the Savior, the singing of hymns and the exegesis of sacred texts. Flavius Joseph estimated at 4,000 the number of Essenes repatriated to Alexandria (where Philo knew them by the name "Therapeutes"), Damascus, Greece, Asia Minor and Italy.

The cemeteries have delivered up the skeletons of men and women, probably the wives of the converts assigned to labor activities, who had been accorded the right to marry with the goal of procreating. They interred their dead with their heads facing north, which was different from other Jews, whom they considered to be non-believers: they judged themselves to be the only representatives of the true Israel. In the same execration, they dismissed the Sadduceans and the Pharisians, who were deemed guilty of spilling the blood of the Messiah. Refusing the sacrifices made under the aegis of the Great Priest, they called for divine vengeance upon the Temple, the object of infamy rebuilt by Herod.

As for Jerusalem, they nourished the ambition to deliver it from the Jews who, by their doctrines, had impiously profaned the holiness of the place. Among many attempts effectuated in this regard, there was the tumult stirred up by Theudas/Thomas and his 4,000 "poor people" (*ebbyonim*) who participated quite well in the Essene spirit.

The apportionment of time equally distinguished them from their co-religionists. The only true observers of Mosaic law, they claimed to hold their calendar to be a divine revelation. Different from the Judean calendar, theirs was solar, not lunar.

According to the indications that Ezechiel advocated, the year was divided into four trimesters and into months of 30 or 31 days, with the result that festivals fell on fixed dates. Easter echoed Wednesday 14 Nizan, two days before the Easter celebrated in Jerusalem.[55]

Such is the calendar to which the evangelical novel of Joshua/Jesus referred, and would later be adopted by Catholic orthodoxy when — appropriating the control of time in its turn — it would arbitrarily anchor at a zero point the beginning of the Christian era.

The Essenes replaced the sacrifices of the Temple with the sacrifice of the body: mortification extinguished the fire of the desires and stoked the ardor of the spirit, to which their miserable existence reduced itself. Their frantic asceticism nourished the ordinary misogyny of patriarchal peoples and pushed it to the state of neurosis. The Qumran manuscripts include a poem against women, the source of all the troubles and perditions of man.[56]

The Rule of the War proscribes sexual relations and excludes from the [ranks of the] Enlightened Ones the woman, the young man, and the impure, understood to be he who has ejaculated.[57]

A much more recent text, issued from Damascus, tolerates the makeshift of marriage, but with the sole goal of procreating and perpetuating the sect.

Scorn for women runs like a counter-point through all of the partitions of Christianity. The Essene or Nazarean Saul/Paul only tolerated their presence in the ecclesiastical assemblies on the condition that they keep quiet; the Marcionites, Elchasaites, Montanists and Catholics all treated them like they were impure beasts. To support [the idea] that this is quite ordinary, according to the prejudicies of the times, would be ignorant of the facts that, at the same time, the schools — nay, the sects — recognized in women and love that which excites the invaluable privilege of creating life and saving humanity. This was the case with Simon of Samaria, certain Naassenes and the Barbelites.

No doubt Pliny the Elder was right to paint a portrait of the Essenes that little accorded with a "people without women, without love, without money." Love was travestied by the adoration of God and clannish solidarity. As far as the absence of money, which was the result of an autocratic economy, it was (as among the Ebionites) a voluntary poverty; much latter, its fantasm would haunt the collectivist and millenarian dreams that — taking root during crises of economic and social transformation — would demand a return to an egalitarian, fraternal, disinterested Christianity, which would be a cathartic prelude to the reign of the holy.

Essenism is the True Original Christianity

In the Eighteenth Century, the erudite Bernard de Montfaucon stirred up a polemic on the subject of the Therapeutes as described by Philo of Alexandria. To Montfaucon, they were a Christian sect, which he proved with serious argumentation.[58] His critics retorted that other Jewish milieu presented the same singularities. Both were right: the Therapeutes were both Jewish and Christian. Until the beginning of the Second Century, the only form of Christianity — that is, before Marcion took exception to it in the name of a *Greek* Christianity — was inscribed in the framework of a reformed and anti-Judean Judaism.

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[55] A. Jaubert, *La Date de la Cene,* Paris, 1957.

[56] N. Toci, *I manoscritti del mar Morto,* Bari, 1967.

[57] J. Duhaine, "Etude comparative de 4 QM FGGG 1–3 et 1 QM," *Revue de Qumran,* XIV, #55.

[58] B. de Montfaucon, *Lettres pour et contre la fameuse question si les Solitaires, appeles Therapeutes, dont a parle Philon le Juif etaient chretiens,* Paris, 1712.

Essenism united all of the traits of primitive Christianity: it was baptist, believed in a Messiah, founded the Churches and was marked by the duality of roads, Light and Darkness, nay, by the duality of the Demiurge and the Good God.

* * *

The Sadduceans and the Pharisians appealed to baptism as a ritual of purification, but among the Essenes it did not retain the value of a spiritual engagement and a communitarian rite of initiation. Thus a hymn proclaims:

> It is by the humility of his soul with respect to all the precepts of God
> that will purify the flesh
> when one sprinkles it with holy water
> and he will sanctify himself in running water.[59]

Symbolically, water purifies the body of its natural impurity, washing it of sensual passions, exonerating the body of its material gravity and elevating it towards God in the ascendant movement of the spirit. Baptism remains without effect if it is not accompanied by a conversion of the heart. The doctrine of Saul/Paul gives to baptism the same spiritual meaning, inverting the baptismal conception honored by certain Alexandrian Gnostic sects, for which water meant the return to the maternal matrix and re-birth in the heart of the welcoming community.

The current state of studies does not permit us to conjecture if a Dosithean or Nazarean influence existed [in Essenism], but undoubtedly certain Essene traits proceeded from Samaritan freedom with respect to Judaic orthodoxy.

The Messiah

The doctrinal system of the Men of the Community shared with the *Book of Henoch I* the lineaments of the Gnosticism and Messianism that would dominate the Jewish Christianities and the Hellenic Christianities up to, nay, beyond the Second Century.

In this system, the angels, the Princes of Light, confronted the fallen angels, the Princes of Darkness, the "guilty ones" or syzygies that opposed Michael and Raphael, Belial and Satan.

The theory of the Son of Man (Adam) is expounded in the *Ascension of Henoch.* When Henoch questions the angel who accompanies him about the Son of Man, "Who is he? From whence does he come?" the angel responds: "It is the Son of Man who possesses justice, who will reveal all of the secret treasures because the Savior of Spirits has chosen him."

The angel specifies that the Messiah is "engendered by Justice," which is a reference applicable to the Essene Master, such as Melchizedek, his *paredros* [divine associate] or *alter ego.*

As the Son of Man was incarnated in the Master of Justice, he will return in the traits of a new Messiah, whom Henoch's parables name the Chosen One, according to the tradition inaugurated by the stanzas on the Servant of YHWH in the *Book of Esaie* (42, 1).

Thus Philonenko[60] emphasized that there exists a veritable Christology in the Qumran texts. It reaches such precision that people have supposed that in certain writings — such as the *Testaments*

[59] A. Dupont-Sommer, *Les ecrits esseniens... , op. cit.* p. 16.
[60] Philonenko, *op. cit.*

of the Twelve Patriarchs (the discourses on God, by the twelve sons of Jacob, to their children Ruben, Simeon, Levi, Juda, Issachar, Zabulon, Dan, Mephtali, Gad, Aser, Joseph and Benjamin) — there are interpositions of Greek Christianity, nay, Catholicism. Therefore, comparing the manuscripts found at Qumran and the revised versions, Philonenko picked out a number of them (minus interpolations), most often concerning the word *Christos.* Here was a Messiah ready to assume the role of the name emblematic of Joshua/Jesus.

Essene Christology evolved from a primitive conception to a modern vision of the Christ. The most ancient texts evoked two Messiahs: one, sacerdotal, indicator to the faithful of the road to sanctification; the other, royal, leader of Israel to victory over the *goyim.* Forty years later, a single Messiah was expected: the Master of Justice, the Chosen One, the *Kyrios* chosen by God to reveal the "New Alliance," the *Novum Testamentum* of which Marcion would later speak).

The wait had begun many years before the Christian era. While the *Rule Annex* (1 Q. Sa 2/11-12) speaks of a time when God "will have engendered the Messiah," the part devoted to Benjamin in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriachs* clearly evokes the coming of a unique Messiah, the reincarnation of the Master of Justice.[61]

> Thus, we too will arise, each in our tribe, adoring the King of the Heavens who appears on the earth under the form of a humble man; and all those who believe in him will rejoice in him. And then, when all have arisen, some for glory, others for shame, the Savior will at first judge Israel for the injustices committed against her; when God takes on flesh as a liberator, they will not believe in him.[62]

We recall that it is a question here of a text unearthed at Qumran that does not include any subsequent interpolations. It is difficult not to discover in it the source of the mythical person called Jesus and the essentials of the doctrine by Saul/Paul. Amplified by the *midrashim,* completed by the particular communitarian practices and modern polemics, and adapated to the Greco-Roman mindset, the speculations arising around the Essene Messiah who was tortured to death around 63 [B.C.E.] would sketch out the scenario of a syncretic Messiah issued from Joshua, transposed during the Zealots' war under Tiberias, rather than from Jacob and Peter, the heroic witnesses and disciples of the *Kyrios* who had guided their acts and died crucified.

The secret name of such a Messiah formed the stakes in a long struggle in the milieu that had been penetrated by Jewish eschatology. Each Essene community or Church produced its own proofs and testimonies with a view towards ratifying agreement with its Christ.

Grotto #4 at Qumran surrendered an Aramaic text, the terms of which entered into the composition of the future Joshua/Jesus:

> He will be great on the earth and will make peace and each will serve him. He will be called the Son of the Great God and by this name he will be called. He will be saluted as the Son of God and we will call him Son of the Most High and his kingdom will be an eternal kingdom.[63]

He will be the celestial figure of the Son of Man announced by the *Book of Daniel,* "the Chosen One in the presence of the Savior of Spirits." "The Light of the people," he will possess the spirit of wisdom,

[61] Id., *Les interpolations chretiennes…* , Paris, 1960, p. 31.
[62] *Ibid.* p. 20.
[63] J. Fitzmayer, S.J., "The Q Scrolls and the NT after forty years," *Revue de Qumran,* XIII, #49–52, p. 613.

science and strength, three qualities that would find themselves in the *Logia,* the remarks attributed to Jesus (in the Second Century).

A number of traits anecdotally attributed to Jesus in the evangelical novels abound in the Qumran writings. The apocalypse included in the *Testament of Joseph* nourished the legend of a virginal birth: "And I saw that in Juda was born a Virgin wearing a linen robe and from her emerged a lamb without blemish."[64]

Manuscript labeled 1 Q H 6, 12 imputes to this Christ-Lamb a vocation that is no longer nationalist, but universal, according to an overture that the Church ordinarily attributed to the school of Saul/Paul: "All nations recognize your truth and all people glory you."

Moreover, the Master of Justice appeared in the manner of the future Joshua/Jesus as a suffering Messiah and the founder of churches: "God wanted it that, in his sorrows, the Master of Justice build his glorious Church and, although the *Hymns* of the Master of Justice do not explicitly present his sufferings as capable of expiating the sins of the others, it is a fundamental doctrine in the sect and one finds in the *Songs of the Savior* (which figures in the *Book of Isaiah* and inspired Qumranian hymns) that that the Savior 'was pierced because of our rebellions, crushed because of our iniquity [...]. He is full of the sins of the many and he has interceded for the sinners' (*Isaiah,* 3, 9, 12)."[65]

Another function of the Master of Justice attributed to Joshua/Jesus and to Saul/Paul: announcing the Good News, which in Greek is the *Evangelion,* the Gospels (*Evangile*).

The Qumranian hymns stipulate that God gave him the mission to be "according to His truth he who announces the Good News (in the time) of His Goodness, evangelizing the humble ones, according to the abundance of His mercy (and watering them) at the source of holiness and consoling those who are contrite of spirit and the afflicted" (XVIII, 14–15).

The hymn inspired by the "Songs of the Savior" in *Isaiah*:[66]

> The spirit of the Savior YHWH is in me,
> Because YHWH has anointed me.
> It is to announce the Good News to the humble that he has sent me
> To bandage those who have a contrite heart [...]

Nothing is missing from the ensemble of fundamental materials that, through re-writing and revision, ended up in the texts of the Hellenic Christianities and Catholicism, even the New Testament that Marcion would brandish like a weapon against the old [testament].

Dupont-Sommer did not fail to reveal it:[67] Essenism (or at least an Essene party that was perhaps that of Saul, opposed to the parties of Jacob, Peter [and] Thomas) wanted to be the sect of the New Alliance, otherwise called the New Testament (*Hymn,* V, 23; *Writing from Damascus*).

R.H. Charles, who has already studied the *Books of Henoch,* which was part of the Essene canon, remarks that the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* is "a product of the school that prepared the road of the New Testament." He goes further, emphasizing that the famous *Sermon on the Mount* attributed to Jesus "reflects in several passages and goes almost as far as reproducing the same phrases from our text." Charles adds that Paul seems to have used it like a *vade-mecum.*[68] Dupont-Sommer reveals

[64]Philonenko, *Interpolations, op. cit.,* p. 29.
[65]A. Dupont-Sommer, *op. cit.,* p. 377.
[66]*Ibid.,* p. 373.
[67]Id., *Observations sur le Manuel de Discipline decouvert pres de la mer Morte,* Paris, 1951.
[68]*Ibid.,* p. 384.

the following, among other examples, in the *Manual of Discipline*: "I will not render retribution for evil to anyone," and there are even recommendations of the apostolic type: "They practice the truth in common and humanity, justice and right, and love of kindness and a modest conduct in all of their ways."[69]

Regarding Saul/Paul, Teicher has collated a great many analogies between the fragments of his letters and several Qumran manuscripts (according to his thesis, the manuscripts are late and express the opinions of Judeo-Christianity and, in particular, that of the Ebionites).[70]

Nevertheless, the divergences between rival groups inscribed themselves on a common foundation, but the cleavage seems to be of a political — not to say, strategic — nature. The Essene Churches of the Ebionite or Nazarean type that claimed for themselves the opinions of Jacob, Peter and Thomas, nay, those of John the Essene mentioned by [Flavius] Joseph, conserved a relatively firm, elitist, perhaps esoteric structure, whereas the schools propagated by Saul appealed to the *rebbim,* to the "many," and thus affirmed themselves to be exoteric and populist.

The Essene Churches

The Church of the Master of Justice wanted to be present in the whole world, universal, a term that translates the Greek word *catholicon.* The Church was built by them to "serve as an impregnable refuge for the Chosen Ones during the war that, at the end of time, the forces of evil will conduct against them."[71]

Hymn VII (8–9) reveals the origin of *Cephas,* "rock," "stone/Peter" [*pierre*] who — adjoined to the Zealot and Essene, Simon — would end up in the wordplay that would found the Church of Rome ("And on this stone/Peter, you will build your Church"). Sure enough, one can read in it the following:

> You have founded on the rock [*rocher*] my edifice
> And the eternal assizes serve me as a foundation
> And all my walls have become a strengthened rampart
> That nothing can shake.

The Church is the community, the Assembly: "The source of justice and the reservoir of power [...] It is to those whom he has chosen that God will give them as eternal possessions. And he has accorded to them by sharing in the lot of the saints and, with the Son of the Heavens, he has reunited their assembly, that of the counsels of the community."[72]

Alongside the Pharisian synagogues of the Diaspora, the Essene Churches organized themselves in a relation of hostility and concurrence. Whereas the synagogical assemblies drew their unity in a Pharisaism endowed with a spiritual center, the holy city Jerusalem (of which the Temple guaranteed the orthodoxy), the Essene communities — devoted to the untiring recasting of the sacred texts — decreed the end of time, speculated on the imminence, nature and name of the Messiah, and constituted rivals churches, fecund with new doctrines. Three centuries would be needed for ecclesiastical monarchism to end up in the supremacy of the Bishop of Rome, contested up to the Seventh Century

[69] *Ibid.,* p. 6.
[70] J.L. Teicher, "The Teachings of the Pre-Pauline Church in the Dead Sea Scrolls," *Journal of Jewish Studies,* 1952, III, #3–5.
[71] A. Dupont-Sommer, *Les ecrits esseniens... , op. cit.,* p. 235.
[72] *Regle,* 11, 6–8, in Philonenko, *Pseudoepigraphie ... , op. cit.,* in Picard, p. 4.

and [all the while] imposing the universality — the *catholicon* — desired by the Master of Justice, the "Just Messiah."

The *Manual of Discipline* renders precise the method of organization in effect: "In all places where there are ten people from the party of the Community, there will not lack among them one who is a priest. And each according to his rank, they sit before him."[73]

As among the Pharisians, the first places were reserved for the old ones, *prebyteroi,* that is to say, far-sighted people [*presbytes*], priests. One of them, called "the inspector of the many" (the *rebbim* of the faithful, with respect to the "perfect ones"), would become the chief, the archon, (in Greek) the *episcopos* (bishop). He is invited to carry himself like a shephard, like a pastor, which is a title that around 140–150 would inspire a Judeo-Christian novel attributed to Hermas, in which the author precisely deplores the discord [*zizanie*] among the diverse Churches of Rome.

At the end of the Second Century, certain churches obeyed a collegiate leadership, a counsel of archons; others adopted the monarchal form privileged by the politics of unification.

When Marcion provoked the rupture with Jewish Christianity, he attempted to found unified churches that he aimed to would be under the control of Rome, federating the churches that were favorable to Saul's school and that rejected the communities that chose to place their legitimacy under the patronage of the Zealot heroes, Ebionites, Nazrareans, Jacob, Peter, Thomas, and Clement, the partisans of which treated Paul like a false prophet. It is still the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs* that justifies the number of the companions of a Messiah whose name, unknown to Mermas in 140 [C.E.], would begin to impose its revelation: Joshua/Jesus, he who "saved, saves, will save"; an infinitesimal battle in the multitude of sects that bordered and confronted each other in Alexandria, Antioch, Corinth, Colosee, Odessa, Rome…

A Dualist Tendency

The Jewish, Sadducean and Pharisian orthodoxies abominated all dualisms that, suspiciously revoking the unity of YHWH, threatened the State and the national mystique. On the other hand, the Samaritans, often reticent with respect to the imported Judean God, never made mysterious their attachment to the plural God, El-Elohim, nay, the Divine Father/Divine Mother dualism.

Essenism did not totally extirpate the Samaritan influence from its heart. The Jewish Gnosticism attested to by the *Books of Henoch* (themselves combatting other Gnostic tendencies) was perpetuated in the diverse primitive Christianities — which were Jewish like the Elchasaitism of the *Homelies of Peter* (around 110), Judaist like *The Pastor of Hermas* (around 140) or Hellenized and anti-Semitic, like Marcionism — as late as the second half of the Second Century, in which only the popular development of the New Prophecy or "Montanism" would be exhausted.

Dualist thought manifested itself in Essenism in diverse ways. No manuscript from Qumran implicitly expounds the idea that two Gods can exist. Nevertheless, it is not excluded that certain currents accredited the syzygy of the Good God and the Demiurge, present in Cerinthe, Marcion, the Naassenes, the Sethians, the Barbelites and many other sects, Christian or not.

The Arab historian Shahrastani (Seventh Century) affirms that, in the Fourth Century, Arius borrowed his doctrine, according to which the Messiah is the first angel of God for the Magharians, "who lived four hundred years before Arius and were known by the simplicity of their way of life and their serene abstinence."

[73] A. Dupont-Sommer, *Observations …* , p. 24.

Who were these Magharians, whose existence dates back to the First Century before the Christian era? Their Arab name leaves little doubt; it means "people of the cavern or the cave," because — Shahrastani makes clear — they hid their sacred texts in caverns.

There is nothing surprising in the fact that the doctrine of the Angel-Messiah (the *angelos-christos*) was originally Essene, since it was shared by the [various] Christianities and predominated up to the historization of Jesus, undertaken in the second half of the Second Century.

Beyond that, the Arab historian explains that the refusal of an anthropomorphic YHWH induced them to impute the creation of the material universe to a Demiurge.[74] Thus it is not impossible that the concept of a God who is good and the inaccessible double of a God who created the bad world, which Marcion in his hatred of Judaism would identify with YHWH the Bloody, was imposed upon certain Essene Churches and defended by Marcion.

Without crediting Essenism in general with a position that was also perceived as a scandal by Pharisaism (and much later by the monarchal current — a God, a Bishop — to which the chiefs of the Christian communities would attach themselves), dualism expressed itself without ambiguity in the doctrine of the two roads and even in the [image of the] "couples" or syzygies still attested to by the *Homelies of Peter.* The struggle between the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness dominated the thought of the Community. Because God "disposed for man two spirits [...] the spirit of truth and the spirit of perversion" (*Rule of the War*).

In each generation, the Sons of the Prince of the Light and the Sons of the Angel of Darkness confront each other in a war from which the saints, the pure ones who renounce the flesh and possess knowledge, *gnosis,* will emerge victorious.

Due to the privileges that it accorded to knowledge, Essenism belonged to Jewish Gnosticism (which would be perpetuated in Kabbalistic investigations).

"You have given me the intelligence of your faith and the knowledge of your admirable secrets," declares Hymn VII (25). Gnosis is nothing other than secret knowledge. But from its essential root grows a great diversity of options and choices (which translates the Greek word *hairesis,* heresy): dualism; the refusal or surpassing of religion; monotheism; salvation for the individual, for a community, for a Christ; rational, mystical or magical approaches to the Logos. Gnosis implies the primacy of knowledge over *pistis,* faith, and the secret, the *Apocryphon,* an apocryphal text that the Church — as part of its seizure of language and meaning — would identify with "false, falsification."

The esotericism of the Essene groups proceeded more easily in the cities of the Diaspora towards an exotericism that was more apt to concur with Pharisian proselytism. Such was, no doubt, the tendency of the school of Saul/Paul. Esotericism itself borrowed from different sources [*voies*]. The secret Gospels (*Apocrypha*) and the Hermetic remarks of Jesus (*Logia*) did not proceed from the same churches that — according to a manuscript from Grotto 4 at Qumran, studied by S.T. Millik[75] — inferred from the morphology of individuals born under certain zodiacal signs their belonging to the cohort of the "spirits of Light" or the horde of the "spirits of Darkness." (Such speculations are found in the Christian astrology of Bardesame, but also in divinatory magic, in the spirit of quarrels over predestination, and in the art of recognizing sorcerers and sorceresses in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries.)

[74]Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord,* Utrecht, 1982, p. 154.
[75]J.T. Milik, *Discoveries in the judean desert. I Qumran, Cave I,* Oxford, 1955.

Towards a Judeo-Christian Syncretism

The thesis, accredited by the majority of historians, of a prophet named Jesus — who founded a church with dogmatic theses, but who in fact issued from the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Centuries, after a long and painful childbirth — underestimates the marginal character of these religious speculations by occulting, in the particular milieu that are concerned, the profusion of messiahs, sects, schools and communities.

Dosithee, the crucified Samaritan Messiah; the Master of Justice, put to death by the Judeans; Melchizedek the Just; Henoch guided by the Sons of Man; Barbelo, who welcomed sperm so as to save the world; Naas, the *Ophis-Christos* or Serpent-Redeemer; Hermes Three Times Great; Seth, Son of Man with the head of a horse or dinkey; Abaraxas with ophidian legs and cockscomb, saver of souls threatened by the Archons — so many Christs among whom Joshua/Jesus, whose name secretly means "God saved, saves, will save," would later carve itself a place in the form of an angel sent by God.

And, among the four or five thousand Essenes of whom Flavius Joseph speaks, what a scramble [*embrouillamini*]! Partisans of Jacob the Just, Simon-Peter, John the Essene, Jochanaan called John the Baptist, Theudas/Thomas, Saul known as Paul (following Marcion), Cerinthe, Zack/Clement and many others who commented upon and adpated the biblical texts by taking extracts from the *midrashim,* sometimes translated into Greek, of which the majority had disappeared but in which it was possible to become aware of a text that had been poorly accepted by the Church and that illustrated the passage from Judeo-Christianity, or Essenism, to a Hellenized Christianity ready to extinguish its Judaic roots: the *Didache.*

In the current of the First Century, among the non-Pharisian Judaicized milieu (Essene or Samaritan), a moralizing pamphlet entitled *Doctrine of the Two Roads* circulated; its wording indicates its origin.

Re-copied, revised, developed and Hellenized, around 140–150 it ended up in a version that its last redactor gave the title *Didache Kyriou dia ton dodeka apostolon tois ethnesin* ("Teachings of the Savior addressed to strangers to faith through the medium of His twelve apostles").

An analysis of the various states of the text and the strata of rewriting has permitted us to extract the oldest kernel of the *Didache.* It was inspired by the *Manual of Discipline* and it makes clear "the disciplinary order that imposes itself on the community." The Superior Ones are called *episkopoi kai diakonai,* bishops and deacons. The moral comportments are hierarchized according to the "two roads." Also covered are baptism, fasting, prayer, and the sharing of bread (much later called the eucharist).

The second great revision dates from 140–150 and is thus contemporaneous with the hostility adopted with respect to the original Judeo-Christianity. The text, known under the title *Didache* or *Doctrina apostolorum,* was honored in the Greco-Roman churches that, in the Diaspora, had separated themselves from the Jewish and Christian churches issued from Essenism. It is contemporaneous with the *Pastor* (still Judeo-Christian) attributed to Hermas of Rome, the *Homelies of Peter attributed to Clement* (on a basic Elchasaite text contemporaneous with Trajan), and the *Epistle attributed to Barnabas* (around 117–130, according to Erbetta).[76]

A trinitarian doxology would be added in the Fourth Century, due to polemics against Arius.

For a long time held as canonical, the *Didache* would finally be excluded from the Catholic Scriptures. A modern version of Judeo-Christianity, it took exception to the Judaic sacrifices and rituals, especially

[76]Erbetta, *Gli apocrifi del NT,* Turin, 1964, t. III.

circumcision, which it spiritualized and interpreted symbolically. The name of Jesus appears in it, but under traits particularly embarassing to the future Catholic orthodoxy: in the manner of the Master of Justice, he carried the title of Servant of God, and in addition he is perceived as an Angel-Messiah, an *angelos-christos,* according to the traditions of the time and notably in agreement with the *Epistle attributed to Barnabas,* in which Jesus is none other than the biblical Joshua.

Chapter 5: The Baptist Movement of the Samaritan Messiah Dusis/Dosithea

Shadow and Light from Samaria

If Samaria constitited an object of scandal for Judea, its neighbor to the south, it was because of Samaria's ancient cults that entered into the project of religious and national[ist] resistance, which was resolved to impede the invasion-politics of Yahwehism and its terrible God, avenger and warrior.

These same Samaritans still tolerated an archaic form of YHWH, close to El, the Father, and the angelic plurality contained in the form of Elohim. Holding the sanctuary of Sichem on Mount Garizim as the only true temple, Samaritanism did not admit any other sacred scriptures than the Torah or *Pentateuch* (the first five books of the Bible) and the *Book of Joshua,* which Hellenization, soon implanted in Samaria, propagated under the name *Book of Jesus* (thus would Origen cite it around 250).

The hatred between Judeans and Samaritans was exacerbated by the destruction of Sichem under the reign of Jean Hyran, Asmonean prince and Great Priest of Jerusalem (135–105 [B.C.E.]).

On the other hand, Hellenization, badly accepted in Judea, encountered a better welcome in Samaria. It is true that the Canaanean and Philistinian substrata, quite long-lived, were not foreign to an Achean implantation, at the time of the migrations of the Second Millennium before the Christian era. The persistance of cultural forms issued from the *Magna Mater,* allied with the audacious critiques of Greek philosophy, introduced into the closed universe of the gods a quite corrosive mixture, of which the teachings of Simon and Barbelite practices offered singular examples, that is, when one discovered them underneath the silence and the calumnies accumulated by the Church's work of eradication and by its complacent historians.

This light of Samaria badly accommodated the sparkling and virtuous road chosen by Essenism. Nevertheless, perhaps it clears up the birth of dissident sects, such as the still poorly-known Sethians, whom the Messiah-Son of Man would frequently encounter in the Qumranian manuscripts.

Between Judea and Galilee, Samaria extended to the rivers of the Dead Sea, where the original kernel of Essenism was established. These places were propitious for the implicit constitution of a front hostile to the Temple, to Jerusalem, to Judean beliefs, nay, to the law of Moses.[77]

Did not Essene dualism draw its origin from the Samaritan distinction between YHWH and his angelic constituent, Elohim? In any case, the heresy of the "two celestial powers" — a veritable crime against the unique God in the eyes of Jewish orthodoxy and condemned by the *Books of Henoch* — was surreptitiously dropped into it, in the confrontation between the Good Angels and the Bad Angels.

Such a doctrine even impregnated the thought of the very Pharisian Philo of Alexandria, when he opposed the beneficial power of *Theos,* the Good God, to the punitive function with which the *Kyrios* or Savoir (the translation of Adonia, the equivalent of the *Tetragrammaton* YHWH) charged himself. Marcion restrained himself from making precise the divergence between the God of the Jews, creator

[77] "Can we exclude Samaritan influence from Qumran?" *Revue de Qumran,* VI, 1967, pp. 109 *sq.*

of a bad world, and the Good God that de-Judaized Christianity would substitute for YHWH as the creator of a world in which the Good would realize itself through the intervention of the Messiah-Redeemer.

But the relation between Essenism and Samaritanism, which here includes the diversity of the tendencies that they nourished, discovered in Dusis/Dosithea a Messianic figure, the importance of whom few researchers have emphasized .

The Messiah Dusis/Dunstan/Dosithea

In the Fourteenth Century, the Samaritan chronicler Abu'l Fath spoke of a certain Dusis or Dunstan around whom were united a messianist and baptist group that he called the Dunstanites at the time of the crisis engendered by the destruction of the Temple at Garizim by Hyran II.

Was a second expansion of Dunstanism manifested by a new eschatological prophet named Dosithea, as Isser suggests?[78] He would have had as his successor a prophet named Aulianah.

But the name Dosithea, Dosi-theos, which refers back to Dusis and means "God gave him," recalls Dusis's quality as an Angel-Messiah. No doubt he also established a rapprochment with another Messiah, come from Galilee: Hanina Ben Dosa, that is to say, son of Dusis.[79]

Dositheaism seems to have assumed in Hellenized form the ancient Dunstanite movement, which was a baptist and messianic movement that resulted from a schism within Samaritanism.[80]

As in Essene dissidence, Dusis's schism was accompanied by a re-casting of the calendar: the adepts attributed 30 days to each month. A century later, the Elchasaites — anecdotally translating the scorn they felt for Saul (assimilated by Dosithea and Simon) — reported that Dosithea founded a sect of thirty men and a woman named the Moon [*la Lune*], who was prostituted in a brothel in Tyre and who was the mistress of the prophet before throwing herself in the arms of Simon.

In the Sixth Century, Bishop Euloge encountered in Alexandria Samaritan groups that still reproached Dosithea for having altered a great many sacred texts. Abu'l Fath shares the indignation with the rest.

In truth, if the prophet Dunstanite rewrote the sacred messages — as the Essenes, Nazarenes, Marcionites, Anti-Marcionites and Catholics did — this was because Moses spoke through his voice, he was entitled to revise the law and adapt it to his divine truth.

Did not Dusis's disciples go further in the critique of Judean and Mosaic doctrine? This is the hypothesis advanced by Fossum.[81] Dosithea — the Hellenized version of Dusis — rejected the prophets accepted by the Jewish canon, called for the reform of Mosaic law and even extolled the abolition of religious duties.

All the milieus that were preoccupied with Judaism debated the observance and the questioning of the rituals claimed to have been prescribed by Moses. The Hellenization of Judeo-Christianity after 140 did not take place on any other terrain. The rejection of the prophets was announced by Marcion.

As for the irreligious attitude, it corresponds to the philosophy of Simon of Samaria, whom the heresiologues communally characterized as the disciple of Dosithea and the father of all heresies. But the amalgam of Dosithea and Simon appears to have come from the same polemical vein as the

[78]Isser, s.j. "The Dosithean," in *Studies in Judaism in the Late Antiquity,* Leiden, 1976, XVII; Th. Caldwell, S.J., *Dositheos Samaritanus, Kairos IV,* 1962, pp. 105 *sq*; R. Simon Wilson, *Dositheos and the Dead Sea ZRGG9,* 1957.

[79]Vilmar, *Annales Samaritani Abulfathi,* Gotha, 1865.

[80]Fossum, *op. cit.,* p. 37.

[81]*Ibid.,* pp. 36 and 37.

identification of Saul with Simon, which was made by the partisans of the churches of Jacob and Simon-Peter.

The Dositheans participated in the general reform movement that, through Essenism, Ebionism, Nazareanism and Paulinism, would end in the Hellenized Christianity of the Marcionites and Anti-Marcionites of the Second Century.

According to Abu'l Fath, the Dositheans were called "the children of the Apostle," the apostle being Moses.[82]

At the hinge of this era, officially decreed to be Christian, many were the apostles and their children. It would be necessary to efface the memory, to have a conjuration of ecclesiastical interests impose the symbolic power of Joshua, leading the nations toward the mythical beyond of the Jordan, under the redemptive name "God has saved, saves, will save" — a conjuration much later obliterated in its turn by the fabrication of a historical Jesis.

In Dosithea, Christian historicism wanted to make a disciple of Jesus named Nathaniel — which corresponds to *Dositheos,* God gave him.[83]

The novels devoted to Jesus abound in traits of this type, in which reality, travestied and put on stage, works to the glory of the principal person. Mythical heroes thus dominate beings and symbols from which, in fact, the legend proceeds.

Dusis preceded, announced and prepared the effervescence — limited until the Zealot movement gave it a growing audience — in which messiahs, apostles, prophets, enlightened ones and charlatans carved out a popular reputation by extolling the reform, rebirth or abolition of Judean conservatism.

Like Essenism, Dositheism or Dunstanism was a baptist, messianic and reformist movement. Baptism occupied a primordial place in it. Prayers were practiced in [bodies of] water, such as bathing pools [*piscines*] or the Jordan, so fertile symbolically.

The erudite blinders on the researchers exploring (with the Church's prejudices) an epoch in which the Church founded its assizes have hardly permitted them to disentangle what has reconciled and distinguished the baptist and Samaritan current of Dunstan/Dositheo (born around 135 [B.C.E.]), Essenism (around 100), Nazareanism (around 50) and the Johannism of Jochanaan/John the Baptist, all of whom were attached to a great ascetic rigor and scorn for the body, the world, women and life.

But there is something more troubling: Dusis is also a cricified and resuscitated Messiah.

The *Annals* of Abu'l Fath cite a group called the *saduqay,* which affirmed: "Men will know the resurrection because Dusis is dead due to a shameful death and Levy was stoned to death; because if Dusis was really dead, then all of the just men of the earth would be dead."

Reserved for slaves and common criminals, the "shameful death" meant execution on the cross. The idea that Dusis, raised to heaven, had not been struck [down] by a real death prevails — when applied to Jesus — in all of the Christianities of the first three centuries, nay, beyond, up to what Catholicism condemned under the name of "Docetism."

Incarnated as the Spirit of God and the reincarnation of Moses in a terrestrial existence marked by redemptive suffering, Dusis did not fail to evoke the syncretic Messiah of the Judeo-Christian Elchasaites, who expressed themselves around 110 in the *Homelies of Peter*: "There is only one true prophet: he who since Adam has been incarnated in the patriarchs Henoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and who, at the end, finds his rest by incarnating himself as Jesus."[84]

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[82] *Ibid.,* p. 48.

[83] M. Goulder, *The Roots of the Christian Myth, The Myth of God Incarnated,* London, 1977.

[84] O. Cullmann, *Le probleme litteraire et historique du roman pseudo-clementin,* Paris 1930, p. 184.

As the Master of Justice, Dusis — suffering and glorious Messiah — assured his faithful an eternal survival, a resurrection according to the spirit. Dusis, the Master of Justice, Dosithea, Jochanaan, Jacob and Simon-Peter: do they not trace the line of the syncretisms successively hostile to Yahwehist syncretism, and that an ecumenism of diverse tendencies would — after the "apocalypse" of 70 — be unified according to the myth of Joshua the Gatherer?

It would not be without interest to note that Levy, disciple of Dusis, put to death by stoning, found himself in the novels of Jesus under the traits of Levy the Publican, *alias* Matthew, to whom are attributed a secret Gospel and a Gospel consecrated by the Catholic canon.

Close to the Johanite, Ebionite and Nazarean sects, Dositheism was opposed, on the other hand, to the Naassenes. The *saduqay* of whom Abu'l Fath spoke actually taught that "the Serprent would govern the life of creatures up to the day of the resurrection."[85] They identified the Serprent with the Cosmocrat, the Demiurge, the Bad God ruling the world, as opposed to the Naassenes, for whom NHS, the Serprent, revealed the road to salvation. The Naassenes, it is true, were sometimes repelled by asceticism and chastity, which was uniformly preached by Esseno-Christianity.

Would not the hostility to Yahwehism engender in Dostheism the identification of YHWH with the Demiurge that Marcion would preside over? In a *midrash* from the Third or Fourth Century, the Samaritan Marqua evoked an ancient tradition in which YHWH revealed himself as the supreme destroyer. He also reported a trait of which one finds traces in the evangelical legends: "At midnight, YHWH destroyed all the first-born of Egypt."[86]

The exegetes of the New Testament betrayed a certain embarrassment when they were faced with the lie that attributed to Herod the massive extermination known as the "massacre of the innocents." All things considered, to impute to a perfectly bloody Jewish king a heinous crime that Marcionism would count as one of a number of angry manifestations of the God of Israel — this expresses well the will, on the part of the fabricators of the Gospels, to give to symbols and abstractions an anecdotal and historical character.

* * *

Finally, Dositheism provided in the eschatological tumult a resonance that was not foreign to the supposed tendency of the mysterious Saul, so fabulously known under the name Paul of Tarse.

According to Fossum,[87] a Dosithean prophet named Aulianah (Hannina Ben Dosa?) proclaimed that the divine pardon was on the verge of being accomplished. His disciples, sectarians of the Messiah Dusis, estimated "that they already live in the period of divine grace."

They affirmed that "salvation and the period of divine grace are not future events: paradise and the resurrection are to be found here and now." Does not Saul/Paul express this in another fashion, by supporting the idea that the Messiah had already come, redeemed men of their sins and saved all those who, imitating his example, had sacrificed their flesh to the spirit?

[85] Vilmar, *op. cit.,* p. 160.
[86] Cited by Fossum, *op. cit.,* p. 245.
[87] *Ibid.,* p. 39.

Chapter 6: Simon of Samaria and Gnostic Radicality

Stripped of the lies and calumnies in which the Judeo-Christian and Catholic traditions have clothed him, like a habit of derision, Simon of Samaria evokes the thinkers who, as much as Heraclitus or Lucrecius, has irresistibly inscribed himself in the modernity of each epoch.

A Hellenized Samaritan, born — according to the heresiologues — in the outskirts of Getta, in the course of the last years of the First Century before the Christian era, Simon was without doubt a philosopher and doctor in the manner of Paracles, whom he resembled in the care with which he interdependently approached the microcosm and the macrocosm, the body of man and the totality of the world.

The rare fragments of his last oeuvre suffice to suggest a radical will in the precise sense of the term: that which attaches itself to the root of beings and things. Issued from Greek rationality, his analysis undertook to render to the *materia prima* of the body (from which the mythical visions of the *Pentateuch* issued) that which the Hebraic religion had snatched from the luxury of desires so as to transpose them — through a catholic and castrating function — into the domain of the spirit.

* * *

A particular malediction struck the majority of the censors. Fascinated by the works that they execrated, overwhelmed by their denatured and destructive rage, they succumbed to the need to cite extracts from the works, the existence of which they did not cease to deplore.

Around 230–250, the first version of a collection entitled *Philosophoumena e kata pason aireseon Elenchos* ("Philosophoumena or Refutation of All Heresies"), abbreviated as *Elenchos,* was published. Successively attributed to Origen and Hippolyte, the Bishop of Rome, the *Elenchos* truly emanated from the Christianity of the New Prophecy; it actually ranked among the heretics another Bishop of Rome, Callixte, accused of permitting the remarriage of widows and the pardon of Christians who abjured — through fear of torture — their crimes in the eyes of the people loyal to the New Prophecy.

So as to refute them with a great blunder, a chapter devoted to Simon quotes extracts from his work *Apophasis megale.* (A kind of objective irony has wanted things such that the most serious study to date of Simon of Samaria comes from a Jesuit, Salles-Dabadie. Not content to publish the Greek text with an ostentatious critique, he pushed scruples as far as establishing a typographical distinction between the text of the author, the remarks of Simon, and the interpolations. The ensemble illustrates quite well the treatment applied by the Christian or Catholic panegyrists to the manuscripts that they transcribed. To the extracts — interpreted as a function of the polemics of the time — were added canonical citations, most often multiplied by later copyists. It is thus a question of proving that the claimed heretic knew them, deformed them or interpreted them falsely. The canonical traditions were thus antedated.)

According to Salles-Dabadie, the *Apophasis Megale* "is the testimony of an archaic gnosis and not a later one."[88]

Fragment 1 offers *en incipit* the original title (stripped of additions): *Apophasis tes megales dynameos* ("Revelation of the Great Power"). Much later, the work would be cited under the title *Megale Apophasis* ("Great Revelation"), in the manner of the Christians or the religious sects that dressed the philosopher up as a prophet and called him *o hestos uios,* the Son of "He who holds himself upright." (The Judeo-Christians of the *Homelies of Peter* would fashion an impostor, a rival of Joshua/Jesus, but it is true that through the anecdotal Simon they aimed at the "false prophet" Saul/Paul).

The meaning of the text, Simon makes clear, "will be sealed, hidden, enveloped and placed in the dwelling in which the root of all has its foundations."[89]

> This dwelling is the man born from blood and (who) has come to live in the Infinite Power.[90]
>
> The Great Power is nothing other than a fire that is, at the same time, hidden and apparent.
>
> The visible (nature) of the Fire contains all visible things, those that one perceives and also those that remain unperceived (due to) fault of attention; the hidden (nature) of the Fire contains all intelligible things, those that come to thought and those that escape us (due to) fault of thought.[91]

Conscious and unconscious, Fire is the energy of life.

The cosmos as well has been engendered by an eternal fire. An uncreated energy, conferred upon its six roots: *Nous* and *Epinoia* (spirit and thought), *Phone* and *Onome* (voice and name), *Logismos* and *Enthymesis* (reason and reflection). The Great Power is enclosed in the six roots, but only in the state of potentiality.

Does it thus dwell in sleep? It doesn't accede to the unity of its perfection: "It fades and disappears, as the power to (understand) grammar and geometry disappears in the human soul; because the power, helped by exercise, becomes the light of beings, but without exercise (it is) only incompetence and darkness; it disappears with the man who dies, as if it had never existed."[92]

The six roots of being indissociably participate in the individual body and the cosmos. *Nous* and *Epinoia* are male and female, the heavens and the earth where the fruits of the macroscopic tree settle so as to reproduce themselves. *Phone* and *Onome* are the sun and the moon; *Logismos* and *Enthymesis,* air and water.

Each element composes with its equals a unity in which the Great Power (enclosed in each of them) re-creates itself. By reassembling the elements in which it was scattered — thus the behavior of Barbelo, the Judeo-Greek form of the *Magna Mater,* who collected the sperm of all the scattered beings with the goal of impregnating himself with a new universe — the *Megale Dynamis* revealed itself as the "seventh power." (The seventh power would become Hebdomade in the Valentinian systems.) At the same time, it manifests the presence in the macrocosm and the microcosm of the *Hestos*: he who has stood up, stands up, will stand up. (Salles-Dabadie is surprised by the bizarreness of this formula.

[88] J.M.A., Salles-Dabadie, "Recherches sur Simon le Mage. L'*Apophasis megale,*" *Cahiers de la Revue biblique,* #10, Paris, 1969, p. 10.

[89] *Ibid.*, p. 15.

[90] *Ibid.*

[91] *Ibid.*

[92] *Ibid.*, p. 21.

It can nevertheless only translate into Greek, *estosa, stanta, stesomenon,* the intemporal character of the verbs in Hebrew. The principle of a man assuming his potential divinity, standing at the center of himself and the world, is understood to be the antipode of the principle that expresses the name of Joshua/Jesus: God saved, saves, will save.)

Fire/energy, uncreated, thus engendered and fashioned man at the heart of corporeal and cosmic matter. Simon undertook to interpret the books of the *Pentateuch,* the only books recognized by the Yahwehist Samaritans, as the expression of the corporeal and terrestrial reality from which he judges them to be issued.

What does the *Book of Genesis* mean? Paradise is the matrix, Eden is the placenta, and the river that "leaves Eden and waters Paradise" (*Genesis,* 2, 10) is the umbilical cord.[93]

> This divides itself into four branches because on the two sides of the cord are placed two arteries, canals of breath and two veins, canals of blood.[94]
>
> When the umbilical cord, leaving the Eden/Placenta, fixes itself in the anatomy of the foetus, at the spot commonly called umbilic, the two veins conduct and transport the blood since the Eden/Placenta (fixes itself) in what one calls the 'doors of the liver' and they nourish the foetus.
>
> As far as the arteries, which are — as we have called them — the canals of breath [*pneuma*], they pass along each side of the bladder in the region of the flat bone, and end up at the great spinal artery called the aorta; and thus, the *pneuma* passes through the 'secret portals' (the sigmoid valves), the road to the heart, and provokes embryonic movement (literally, the respiration of the foetus).
>
> The infant, as it forms itself in Paradise, doesn't take nourishment through its mouth and doesn't breathe through its nostrils. Plunged into liquid, it would be die on the spot if it breathed; it would breathe the liquid and would be asphyxiated. But it is entirely enveloped by the membrane called amniotic; it nourishes itself through the umbilical cord, and as I have said, it is through the means of the spinal (artery) that it receives the substance of the *pneuma.* (*)[95]

(*) For Simon, *pneuma* meant "breath of life." The Barbelites would identify *pneuma* with *sperma.* For the Judeo-Christians, it was the Spirit, before ending up, among the Catholics, as the Holy Spirit.

The four branches or vessels into which "the river that leaves Eden" were divided correspond to the four meanings of the foetus: sight, smell, taste, and sound. Touch only appears after the birth of the infant.

The river is what Moses called the Law, and each book addresses one of those meanings.

Genesis illustrates sight, the look that encompasses the cosmos. Crossing the Red Sea, *Exodus* is the road of blood that — through ordeals or bitterness — leads to knowledge of life. There begins taste, initiating itself in the "bitter water" (blood) that knowledge and the Logos change into sweet water, the source of life.

Simon, explaining the transmutation of blood into sperm, cites the flower of life offered by Hermes in the *Odyssey* (X, 304–305): "Its root is black and its flower like milk; the gods call it *moly.* Difficult to cultivate by mortal men; but the gods can do anything."

[93] *Ibid.*, p. 25.
[94] *Ibid.*.
[95] *Ibid.*, pp. 27–29.

Smell and breathing are connected to the third book, *Leviticus*; sound with the fourth, *Numbers,* the rhythm of which refers to the words. Finally, *Deuteronomy* refers to the touch of the new-born, who discovers the world by appropriating it. As *Deuteronomy* recapitulates the preceding books, touch summarizes and contains the other senses.

But here is the important part of Simon's doctrine: the man who, in the formation and perfection of his senses, becomes aware of the presence in himself of the Great Power, and so acquires the power to restore it and re-create it in its becoming.

> The unengendered things are all in us, as power, not in acts; thus grammar and geometry. If the aid of words and instruction thus intervene, if bitterness is changed to sweetness, that is to say, lances into scythes and swords into plowshares, we will not be of the straw and wood destined for the fire, but a perfect fruit, fully realized, equal to and resembling the unengendered and infinite Power. But if there remains only a single tree that does not produce perfect fruit, the arbor [*l'arbre*] must be destroyed.[96]

There exists an indissoluble relation between the microcosm of the individual body and the macrocosm. If man does not realize his nature of Fire, his original and immanent energy, "he will perish with the cosmos." (The *First Epistle to the Corinthians* attributed to Saul/Paul takes an expression from Simon [I, XI, 32] that isn't the only trace of residual Gnosticism in the scriptures of the enemy of Jacob and Peter. It gives a singular credit to the *Homelies* in which Simon designates Paul.)

What is the nature of the Great Power from the instant that it materializes itself in an engendered being? According to Simon, it is fire or the eternal energetic flux, identified with the Genesic [*genesique*] principle, sexual force.

> Among all engendered beings, fire is the principle of the desire for generation, and it is just that the desire for changing generation is called 'burning.'[97]
>
> Therefore, fire, which is simple, undergoes two transformations: in men, in the blood, which is hot and red in the image of fire, is transformed into sperm; while in women, this same blood is transformed into milk. The masculine form (of fire) becomes a *Genesic* force and the feminine form becomes food for the new-born.[98]

There is, for Simon, a somatisation of the Great Power: it manifests itself in the power to engender beings through desire, but also through the power of desire to engender in its turn — or more exactly re-creating it in the unity of its scattered fragments — the *Dynamis* of which all life is simultaneously the effect, the immanence and the becoming.

To become aware of the permanent flux of life reveals libidinal energy to be the source of a will capable of realizing in each the Great Power in acts that is none other than the government of the destinies. It is what the religious spirit translates with the expression "to become God." Assuredly, no man in Antiquity, with the exception of Lucrecius, dared to affirm the primacy of the earth over the heavens and the man of desire over the spiritualized brute.

Completing the demythification of *Genesis,* Simon explains that the fire/desire energy is the flaming sword "that twirls [*tournoie*] to guard the road of the Tree of Life" (*Genesis,* 3, 24).

[96] *Ibid.*, p. 33.
[97] *Ibid.*, p. 35.
[98] *Ibid.*

> Because blood turns into sperm and milk, the Power becomes Father and Mother; the Father of the beings who are engendered, nourished from the beings who grow up. It needs nothing and is self-sufficient.
>
> As far as the Tree of Life, 'guarded by the flaming, twirling sword,' it is the Great Power, as we have called it, born from itself, which contains all things and which resides in the six powers (that is to say, the six roots).
>
> Because, if this sword of flames does not twirl, the beautiful tree will waste away and be destroyed; but if it turns into semen and milk, the Logos that resides in it through power, finding a convenient place, good for it to become the Logos of Souls, will begin with a very small flash, then it will grow more and more. It will grow until it becomes an infinite power, immutable, equal and similar to an immutable eon, which will no longer submit to becoming during the infinite eternity.[99]

Thus, the amorous conjunction of man and woman realizes through the act of creation the incarnation of the Great Power. From its conception, the infant receives with the Logos the flash of the *Megale Dynamis.* This flash will belong to it [the infant] by increasing its ardor as fire and Logos — otherwise called desire and consciousness of the creative act — , in order to realize in it the eternal presence of the energy that creates and re-creates itself without beginning, nor ending, and that is a flux of life.

For as much as each develops through desire and its consciousness (fire and its thought), through the *Megale Dynamis* from which it receives the spark, each is closer to passing from the state of receiver of energy to the capacity to act on it and the cosmos. Surpassing the monstrous couple, formed by man and his gods, the man of the Great Power invents a universe that belongs to him without reserve.

Simon is Gnostic only through the importance that he accords to the consciousness of the energy by which each person is assured the privilege of becoming the totality of the life that each carries within.

How does he not take exception to the men who created Gods by debasing themselves in the idea that the Gods created them? And how could he not be exposed to the hatred of people for whom the spirit religiously exalts itself through scorn for the earth, the body and desire?

The first travesty of Simon was to dress him in the reputation of a Man-God. Justin the Apologist incorrectly affirms that a statue was erected in Rome to the glory of this philosopher. He makes precise in his *Apology,* XXVI, that Simon was as adored as Zeus was. He speaks of a woman called "the first thought of Simon." She was Epinoia, in whom the *Nous* had incarnated herself (she was symbolized by Athena in Greek philosophy). Anecdotally translated by Justin, the allegorical Epinoia became Helene, mistress of Simon, prostituted in a brothel in Tyre. The Judeo-Christian staging erected him as a rival to another Man-God, one named Jesus, whose project was to destroy and disparage the man of energy invoked by Simon so as to edify and increase.

All things considered, perhaps it is necessary to impute to the disciples of Simon the same deification of which the Christian communities speak, claiming for themselves Jacob the Just and Simon-Peter, and [to note that] the insistence to summon [*appeler*] Saul/Paul from the name Simon "the Magician" suggests a kind of self-deification in which the presumed author of the *Epistles* assimilates the Great Power to the suffering and glorious Messiah, incarnated in each person. (Isn't Paul identified with *Hestos,* with the God living in his heart, whom he calls Joshua/Jesus and champions?)

[99] *Ibid.*, pp. 35–37.

* * *

In *The Name of God,*[100] Fossum explains that the Great Power, the *Megale Dynamis,* designated for the Samaritans the divine name but also the human force assumed by the divine manifestation. Although Simon removed its religious acceptance so as to assimilate it to a creative flux of life, of which the spark, revived by love, offers to the individual the capacity to create himself, the dominant mindset obeyed the religious conditioning that impregnated the sects both close to and radically different from the teachings of Simon, such as the Naassenes and the Barbelites, for whom sexual fusion remained under the obedience to a divinity.

The other singularity of Simon concerns the primacy that he accorded to the individual person and his/her body, interdependent with the cosmos. His project resided in the realization and the mastery of destinies, not in the notion of salvation that Christianity would impose for nearly two thousand years.

Simon appeared at a point of fracture. The unitary Jewish myth encountered in its decline the desacralized critique of Greek rationality, a market rationality. And, in the same way that the European Renaissance saw liberty concretized in the radicality of Paracelsus and La Boetie, the beginning of the First Century manifested in creators such as Simon of Samaria and Apollonois of Tyane a human presence, the memory of which the regression to Christian myth would suffocate, until myth and the sacred would disappear in their respective turns.

The teachings of Simon would not escape the regression that would impose the return to religious forms, a return whose triumph Hellenized and rationalized Judaism — purged of its orientalism — would consecrate by coronating with its Arachnean linen the bureaucratic empire that Rome propagated through out the world.

Its influence leaked out [*transparait*] among the Naassenes and the Barbelites. It touched Saul/Paul and Marcion, expressed itself in certain manuscripts at Hag-Hammadi. It penetrated even into the anti-Gnostic Christianity of the New Prophecy, in which Priscilla affirmed that the Christ "visited" her and slept near her in Pepuza — the New Jerusalem — and took the form of fire and "put his Wisdom in her."

But it is especially in the Hermetic current, which was very important in Alexandria, that the connection [with Simon] imposed itself; with this connection it is easy to disentangle which one in the exchange is older.

"It is good that a new conception of the world proposes *theurges* such as Alexander of Abonatichos and Apollonois of Tyane," Annequin writes.[101]

According to a remark attributed to Apollonois of Tyane, earth, water, air and vegetal fire compose an alchemy of the micro- and macrocosmic realization that Simon would not disavow: "The doors of the earth are open; the road of flowers is open. My spirit was understood by the spirit of the heavens, by the spirit of the earth, by the spirit of the sea, and by the spirit of the flowers."[102]

It is not against such a Master's degree that the Talmudists guarded: "Whomever researches the four things, what is high, what is low, what was at the beginning, what will be at the end [...], he would be better off if he had not been born."[103]

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[100] Fossum, *op. cit.,* p. 160.
[101] J. Annequin, *Recherches sur l'acte magique et ses representations aux 1st et 2d siecle,* Paris, 1979, p. 16.
[102] *Ibid.*, p. 17.
[103] *Ibid.*

The gnosis of *Hermes Trismegiste* presents a spiritualized version of the Simonian doctrine ("If you are made of Life and Light, and if you *know* it, you will one day return to the Life and the Light"). On the other hand, the tradition that expressed itself in the *Apocalypse of Asclepius* (the 8th scripture in Codex 6 of Nag-Hammadi) belongs to the Simonian theory of the *Megale Dynamis*:

> If you want to see the reality of this mystery, see also the marvelous image of the union (*synousia*) that is consummated by man and woman: arriving in its turn, the semen gushes. At that moment, the woman receives the power of the man and the man also receives the power of the woman because such is the effect (*energein*) of the semen.[104]

A countercurrent to the morbidity that would be propagated by generations of Judeo-Christians, Gnostics, Marcionites, Anti-Marcionites, and Catholics, the *Apocalypse of Asclepius* thrashed those who scorned the world and "preferred death to life."

Inversely, it was an abstract and speculative tendency that illustrated the *Poimandres,* which would inspire many Gnostic cosmogonies. After the separation of the light from the darkness, a struggle between two antagonistic principles ensued. The divine entity, seduced by the image that it projected in matter, desired to unite itself with it. The father creature, in androgynous form, thus engendered a composite creature, half-Logos and half-Anthropos, or primordial man (Adam, according to Jewish mythology).

From his superior part, man radiates a luminous particle, ejaculated by the divinity and imprisoned in him. In the beginning, the spermatic emission of the divine power spurted. However, *panspermie* is both spiritualized — the *pneuma* or breathe of life transcends the *sperma* — and assimilated to a Fall, a cascading slide from the light into the terrestrial matrix, obscurity, chaos, and matter.

In fact, what fundamentally distinguished Simon from the religious or Hermetic Gnostics is the nature of the amorous relation, a fundamental relation, exalted as creative force or, on the contrary, burdened with guilt, afflicted by the idea of downfall, mortified through renunciation, abstinence and asceticism.

Counter to Simonian radicality, one sees the brutal repression of the Esseno-Christian type and the hierogamoc rituals of the Naassenes and Barbelites, for whom ejaculated sperm nourished the divine *pneuma,* nay, magic practices. (Irenaeus, after taking himself to the *Perates,* wrote that "they call the matrix the factory of heaven and earth" (*Hysteram autem fabricatorum coeli et terrae*).[105] Likewise, at the end of the Second Century, the *Gospel attributed to Philip* called the *Plerome* [the Totality], *koinon,* "nuptial chamber" or the "place of union."[106] Delatte speaks of a magic stone called the "key to the matrix," no doubt tied to a rite of participation in the fecund and sexual vitality that is the attribute of the Gods and that the magician hopes to appropriate like a particle of eternity.[107])

There is a magic inherent in foetal creation: the matrix forms the *anthanor,* the transmutation of the sperm and the ovum return in the notions of *surrectio* and *resurrectio.* The idea incurs the condem-

[104]Menard, *Les Textes de Nag-Hammadi,* Leiden, 1975, pp. 127 and 128. [*Translator's note*: the English translation published in *The Nag Hammadi Library,* edited by James M. Robinson, revised edition (San Francisco, 1990) is as follows: "And if you (Asclepius) wish to see the reality of this mystery, then you should see the wonderful representation of the intercourse that takes place between the male and the demale. For when the semen reaches the climax, it leaps forth. In that moment, the female receives the strength of the male; the male, for his part, receives the strength of the female, while the semen does this."]

[105]Irenaeus, I, 31, 1.

[106]"Les noces spirituelles dans l'Evangile selon Philippe," *Museon,* Louvain, 1974, LXXXVII, 1–2, p. 157.

[107]Delatte, *Etudes sur la magie grecque,* Louvain, 1914, p. 75.

nation of the rabbis, according to a fragment collated by Koller: "God reserves three keys that he has not wanted to trust to any intermediary: those of the matrix, the rain, and the resurrection."[108]

The So-Called Disciples of Simon

Amidst the ignorance that the life and work of Menander dwelled in, it is necessary to credit his idea that Justin the Apologist was among the disciples of Simon, which is hardly easy. A Gnostic Samaritan, he taught at Antioch, where the Nazarenes enjoyed a certain influence. Irenaeus accused him of magical practices destined to vanquish the bad angels and resuscitate the dead so as to no longer die, which was a programme that was at least vague and did not exclude the Esseno-Christian viewpoint.

It is the same with Satornil. Irenaeus borrowed from him a dualism of Samaritan type, which distinguished between El the Father, become the YHWH of the Judeans, and Elohim, his angelic cohort around whom rebels elements had created the bad world.[109] Only a Savior-Messiah could come exhausted from a universe surrendered to the forces of evil. And here Satornil, close to Essenism but not to Simon, extolled a strict asceticism. It seems that Satornil, who among the first to do so, had conferred upon his Messiah-Savior the emblematic name Joshua/Jesus.[110]

As far as Cerinthe, he was one of the Judeo-Christian philosophers preoccupied with the name and nature of the *angelos-christos.* Indications from Epiphanius of Salamis, who in the Fourth Century treated him as a false apostle, and from Irenaeus, who engaged in a polemic with the Apostle John, throw *a contrario* a certain light on the fundamental writings much later revised as the canonical *Gospel attributed to John.* One knows that at first the text carried traces of Naassenism and belonged to Christian Gnosticism. It isn't impossible that Cerinthe — but this is only a hypothesis — was the author of a *midrash* that was revised many times before being placed under the name of John and that the meaning of this *midrash* would obey the syncretic will to accord Naassenism with Nazarenism, the Serpent-Redeemer or NHS thereby assuming the name of the Messiah Joshua/Jesus, himself identified with the crucified Serpent.

On the other hand, the shadow of Simon stands out more clearly against the group founded by Carpocrates and his son Epiphanius, and against the Gnostic Justin (not to be confused with the apologist decapitated in 165), the presumed author of the *Book of Baruch,* in which Genesis is analyzed in the light of the auto-creation of man (the *autogene*). God planted the Garden of Eden by bringing together two uncreated principles, Elohim and Eden, from whom would be born a third principle, the most elevated, Priapus, in whom the Good and the Life were concentrated.

The name of the Great Power multiplied with the [number of] sects. Michel Tardieu studied the concept of *Bronte,* the Thunder, in the *Untitled Writing* (2d of Codex VI in the Nag-Hammadi Library), and proved that it identified itself with the *Megale Dynamis,* that is, the Great Power that the *Apocryphon of John* called Ennoia, the Valentinians called Sophia, the Barbelites called Barbelo, and the Naassenes called Brimo-Demeter.[111]

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[108] W. Koller, *Archiv fur Religionswissenschaft,* VIII, 1915, p. 229.
[109] Irenaeus, I, 24, 1–2.
[110] Grant, *Gnosticism and Early Christianity,* New York 1959, pp. 15–17.
[111] M. Tardieu, *Museon,* 87, 1974, p. 530.

The collection at Hag-Hammadi includes a hymn (NHL II, 8, 34–35), *Ego eimi,* which celebrates with a singular force the will of the individual to become his/her own creator, in the fusion of universal forces:

> I am part of my Mother and I am the Mother, I am woman, I am the Virgin, I am the consoler of sadness, my spouse is he who engendered me and I am his mother and he is my father and my lord; he is my strength; what he wants, he says; by all rights I become, but I have engendered a lordly man.[112]

[112] *Translator's note*: these very phrases and/or phrases very similar to them do in fact appear in the English translation of this hymn, titled "The Thunder, Perfect Mind" (*The Nag Hammadi Library,* edited by James M. Robinson, revised edition: San Francisco 1990), but they do not appear in this order. It appears that Vaneigem's source — Tardieu's *Museon*? (see footnote 24) — offered a skim rather than a deep quote from this hymn. For its entire text, see the collection of the Gnostic Society Library at www.gnosis.org.

Chapter 7: The phallic and fusional cults

The conquest of the lands of Canaan by the Hebrew invaders began by Judaizing and thereby honoring the agrarian cults among the vanguished so as to better strike to prohibit and defame their persistent practice. The same for the rites of adoration of the Serpent, in which the symbolic participates in phallic power and, at the same time, the mysteries of fecundation.

Despite the danger that certain species present, the serprent evokes by the grace of its movements the dance of love, to which the bodies of the lovers surrender themselves. Doesn't the allegory of salvation — the caduceus in which two serpents intertwine — conserve the memory of the force of life inherent in pleasure and in its slow reptation? More than any other mythology, the Bible changed the serpent into an object of abjection, terror and evil.

I would like to conjecture that the religious spirit that substituted itself for an analogical and totemic approach to the serpent — which in a certain way removed from it the perils of venom and strangulation — emphasized to the point of hyperbole a danger of death that instead issued from the anathema hurled against this part of life and pleasure, so hostile to the power of the Spirit and its priests.

The Hebrews annexed the cult of the serprent into their gestating monotheistic syncretism in the form of the *seraphim* (the "seraphins," much later changed into angels).

In *Deuteronomy* (8, 15), *nahash seraph* designates the burning serpents that murder people in the desert. *Numbers* (21, 6) speaks of *nahashim seraphim.* If the word *seraph* is applied to serpents, it is because of an idea of a "burning bite," because the root of the word in Semitic [languages] is the verb "to burn" and, more precisely, in *Jeremiah* (7, 31), the act of burning infants on the altar of Baal.[113]

Fecundation and expiating sacrifice of the new-born, infant or animal, inscribed themselves in the essence of the religions: the production of lives reduced to the force of work implies the destruction or the repression of non-productive libidinal energy.

The serpent (*nahash, NHS*) plays a predominantly sexual role in *Genesis.* It is condemned sexually, as is well illustrated by a Talmudic tradition (*Aboda Zara,* 22 b): "When the serprent possessed Eve, he inoculated her with filth."[114] And *Genesis* is no less explicit in the resolution of Adam (3, 20) to call his wife Hawwah (Eve), playing on the word *hayah,* which expresses the idea of life *and* is similar to the Aramaic *hivyah,* "serpent." Much later, Clement of Alexandria would remark that, "if one thickens a little the pronunciation of the name of the first woman, one would evoke in Jewish ears the name of the female of the serpent species."[115]

Sexual initiation, with its lascivity or art of caresses, originally depended on the privileges of the woman. The patriarch, whom the violation of the earth by the agriculture of labors had carried to an absolute power, treated women in the same spirit of exploitation. The lascivious and feminine undulation of exuberant life fell under prohibition, while he erected himself under the sign of the power of the phallic "plowshare," symbolized by the bronze serpents that Moses held erect in the

[113] W. Duliere, *De la dyade a l'unite par la triade,* Paris, 1965, p. 76.
[114] Rapporte, *ibid.,* p. 78.
[115] *Ibid.*

desert, carriers of a mortified life — serpents whose venom impregnated women and nature, both condemned to produce until exhausted.

This serpent, triumph and terror of virile politics, would be transformed in Hebraic mythology into Satan. Alan Rowe has shown the importance of the cult of the serpent at Beth-Shan, where he led a campaign of excavations. Beth-Shan would not be other than the House of the Serpent-God and Shahan the divinified serpent. He remarks that *shahan* read backwards is *nahash,* the root NHS expressing in its diverse permutations the idea of the serpent in all of the Semitic languages.[116]

It was the archaic cult of the serpent — at the same time proscribed and recuperated by Judaism — that connected the sects that, owing to their encounter with the Judeo- and Hellenized Christianities, strove to integrate it into their salvational myths, influencing certain tendencies before falling under the condemnation of the New Prophecy and Catholicism.

The Naassenes or Ophites

The late and rudimentary study of the history of the Naassenes left one in ignorance concerning the Messianic groups — active between Judaic antiquity and the appearance in Egypt, and particularly in Alexandria — that speculated upon the redemptive nature of the Serpent or NHS (*nahas*).

The Naassenism of Alexandria perhaps constituted a syncretism that brought together Jewish, Phoenician, Egyptian and Greek elements. The Phoenicians gave to the serpent the name *Agathodaimon,* "beneficent being" (the apotropaic meaning is not obvious). The Egyptians translated *Agathodaimon* as *kneph,* which one finds in the *knouphis* (coiled serpents) of amulettes or abraxas. The contribution of the old Ophidian cult of the Greeks would lend to Naassenism the belated name Ophitism.[117]

When Nazareanism gained importance towards the end of the First Century, the Naassenes, in a statement from their ecumenical assembly, did not reject the integration of the name Joshua/Jesus into the diverse [list of] names of their Ophis-Christos, their Serpent-Messiah: Kneph, Agathodaimon, NHS, Abrasax.

Around 230–250, the concurrent character of Jesus and the *Ophis-Christos* worried Origen and made him indignant. Blaming a Naassene prophet named Euphrates, he judged it useful to make this precise: "The Ophites are not Christians, they are the greatest adversaries of Christ."

Moreover, the confusion between Christians and Naassenes proceeded from a tardy evolution, as Fossum remarks: "The serpent is transformed into a redeemer as much as the God of the Old Testament was found to be degraded into a harmful Demiurge, devoid of wisdom, named *Ialdabaoth,* who doesn't know that there is a God beyond him."[118]

Whatever the case, in the First Century Naassenism entered into the quarrel of Messiahs who agitated the religious milieu from all sides. Despite the revisions and rewritings, the *Canonical Gospel attributed to John* (*) retained, as did the *Apocryphal Gospel attributed to Thomas,* traces of a fundamental writing belonging to the Naassene current in which *Iesous-Christos* was substituted for *Ophis-Christos.*

(*) "And in the same way that Moses would raise the Serpent in the desert, likewise it was necessary that the Son of Man was raised so that whomever believed in him had eternal life" (*Gospel attributed to John,* 3, 14–15).[119]

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[116] *Ibid.*

[117] J. Matter, *Histoire critique du gnosticisme,* Paris, 1828, t. II, p.53.

[118] Fossum, *op. cit.,* p. 268.

[119] Quoted by Leisegang, *La Gnose,* Paris, p. 81.

In the necessity in which it found itself falsifying history so as to demonstrate its antiquity, the Church would advance the idea that the Naassenes were inspired by Jesus so as to make NHS a suffering and redeeming Messiah. But beyond the fact that Naassenism greatly preceded Christianity, the Church was not even constrained to draw its inspiration from the martrydom of the Master of Justice or Dusis. Because the primary nature of the seraphims that are closest to God is the serpent, as the *Book of Henoch* (20, 7; 61, 10; 71, 7) calls it. It wanted to reveal to Adam and Eve the pleasure in and knowledge of the union in which divine immortality dwells, and this is why the jealous God punished it, nailed it to the ground or, according to certain texts attributed to Moses, to the Tree of Life on which its skin hung, crucified.

The Gospel of Truth, discovered at Nag-Hammadi, still tells the history of the Garden of Eden from a Naassene point of view: the principle of divine wisdom — equal to that of Sophia, the Angel-Messiah or the *pneuma* — proposed to offer knowledge to Adam and Eve. The Jealous God prohibited them access to gnosis and, expelling them from Paradise, condemned them to a mortal destiny.

NHS, the serpent of knowledge and pleasure — in the manner of the *Kundalini,* which wakes the body to its potential richness — introduced into the human being, male and female, the vital breath, which was called the *pneuma* or the Spirit in the religious groups.

From what the Serpent-God penetrated into Eve and into Adam, which was insufficient for immortality, certain people have inferred that the Naassenes practiced coupling in a sexual indifferentiation that symbolically recreated the original androgyny. Perhaps it was to them that the remark sometimes attributed to Simon of Samaria was addressed: "All earth is earth, and it does not matter where one sows seeds [*seme*]."

No doubt there existed a diversity of sects in Naassenism, since certain tendencies extolled asceticism and thus embraced Esseno-Christianity, as much as others practiced sexual liberty in the name of the fusion of man, woman and world, entwined in NHS.

The invocation of a primordial erotic entity was expressed in a representation that was frequently engraved on the talismatic stones or amulettes in the form of a cameo, to which one gave the name abraxas by deformation of the name of power, Abrasax.

It was a tutelary God with the head of a rooster and legs in the form of serpents. Armed with a shield and a whip, it repelled hostile forces and erected itself phallically in the interior of an oval that symbolized the sex [organs] of the woman. Solar at the head and terrestrial in the ophimorphic legs that formed the support of sexual power, it was a God of fusion, the invocation of whom was modeled on the "song of the seven vowels"[120] that corresponded to the seven spheres that the initiate, elevated by amorous ecstasy, had to cross to attain the Great Power.

It is thus possible that, among the Naassenes, there developed the idea of salvation through sexual enthusiasm, quite close to Tantrism and dressed in a religious travesty of Simon's thought.

The idea that the Logos, in the manner of a serpent that coils in the form of a circle — thus forming the *ouroboros* or serpent that bites its own tail and often figured on the abraxas — , descended to matter and returned to God, from whom it issued, suggested to the Naassenes an interpretation of *Genesis* that imitated Simon:

> The Ocean that flows in circles from high to low and low to high, and the Jordan that descends and resumes its course, are the images of a single and same Logos that moves itself and constitutes the most intimate essence of the living world. Another symbol of

[120]Delatte, *op. cit.,* p. 78.

> this process is that of the serpent, *naas* or *ophis,* in the form of the serpent that bites its tail, thus figuring the cycle of becoming, the *Hen to Pan.* The serpent is the only object of their cult. 'It is the humid element (the Ocean and the Jordan); without it, no being in the world could constitute itself, immortal or mortal, animate or inanimate. All is subject to it; it is good; it contains in a single horn, as in the horn of a bull (*Deuteronomy,* 33, 17), the beauty of all beings and it gives the grace of youth to each creature according to its own nature; because it impregnates all things "in the manner of the river that flows from Eden and divides itself into four branches"' (*Genesis,* 2, 10; *Elenchos,* V, 9 12–15). Eden, from whence flows the river — this is the brain of man, the celestial spheres are the membranes that envelop the brain. The paradise that crosses the river is the head of man. The four branches in which it divides itself: the Pison, the Geon, the Tigres and the Euphrates, are sight, sound, breath and mouth. From the mouth comes prayer, the Logos as much as word; through the mouth comes nourishment, the spiritual nourishment obtained by prayer: 'It gladdens, nourishes and forms the pneumatic, the perfect man.'[121]

According to the *Elenchos* (as always), which seems to refer to a Christianized Naassenism — because this is radically divergent from the philosophy of Simon — , the Naassenes divided man "into three parts, of which the first is spiritual, the second psychical, and the third terrestrial. It is through knowledge of this man that knowledge of God begins: the knowledge of man, they say, is the beginning of perfection; the knowledge of God is the consummation" (*Elenchos,* V, 6, 4–7). And the author of the *Elenchos* adds, accrediting a connection between the Naassenes and the Nazarenes: "Such are the capital points of the many doctrines that Jacob, the brother of the Savior, transmitted to Mariamne."

Who was Mariamne? Not the Jewish Queen, wife of Herod who was put to death at the age of 90 (she lived from 60 [B.C.E.] to 29 [C.E.]), but another name for the Jewish Achamoth, the Greek Sophia, who would become Myriam-Marie, Virgin and Mother of the Savior in the evangelical novels about Jesus.

It was Mariamne, issued from the antique *Magma Mater,* whom the Naassenes placed above Chaos. She engendered the Son of Man (Adam), of whom NHS was one of the incarnations, to save the men of the bad world in which the Demiurge holds them prisoner, at least according to the Ophites, whose doctrines are reported by the *Elenchos.* (Celse speaks of Christians drawing their origin from Mariamne [Origen, *Contra Celsum,* V, 63].)

The work of the Demiurge produced corruption and death. Then the *Ophis-Christos,* born to the Virgin Mariaumne, intervened:

> 'Thus no one can be saved, nor rise again, without the Son, that is to say, the Serpent. In the same way that he supplied from above the imprints of the Father, likewise, inversely, he carried back from down here the imprints of the awakened Father and reprised the traits of the Father' (*Elenchos,* V, 17, 78). The entire cycle is conceived as a natural cycle, one might say almost physical. The superior Logos attracts the spiritual element of matter: 'As the Napitha attracts to itself all parts of fire, or rather as it aims to attract iron and only iron, as the beak of the falcon of the sea attracts gold but only gold, as amber attracts the scraps of paper; thus the Serpent brings back from the world, at the exclusion of

[121]Lesisegang, *op. cit.,* p. 100.

> everything else, the perfect race formed in the image of the Father and likewise of his essence, such that it had been sent by him down here.'[122]

Perates, Cainites, Nicolaites, Koukeens

The phenomenon of the proliferation of the sects didn't only touch Esseno-Baptism, but also characterized the great religious currents issued from other sources, Judean or Samaritan. Naassenism was divided into rival groups, communities or Churches. In the doctrinal confusion of the first two centuries of the Christian era, the fundamental consent proceeded less from the name and nature of the Messiah — NHS, Seth, Joshua, Dusis, Adam, Sophia, Barbelo, etc. — than a behavior marked by asceticism and the renunciation of or surrender to the pleasures of love, or the repression of constrained desires.

The aggressive remarks in the *Elenchos* in fact reveal a constant: "The priests and the guardians of this doctrine were those whom one would call, at first, the Naassenes, from the Hebrew word *naas,* which means 'serpent'; thereafter, they also called themselves Gnostics, claiming to only know the depths. They divided themselves in many sects so as to form a multiple heresy that in fact, in reality, was only one heresy, because it is the same thing that they designate with different names, with the result that rivalries have profited at the expense [*progres*] of the doctrine" (*Elenchos,* V, 3, 3–4).

Koukeens, Phibionites, Stratiotics, Levitics, Perates, Cainites, Nicolaites — so many mysterious names and local designations of groups anchored with their particularities to a communal faith or the fantasmatic fruits of the heresiologues, who were always anxious to exhibit the chaos of the heterodoxies so as to underline the unity of the "true" belief in a "true" Messiah.

The preeminence of a saving Mother Goddess and a fusional cult of the phallic serpent brought a kind of unity to Naassenism, which was prey to behavioral variations that went from Essene abstinence to the creative love extolled by Simon of Samaria.

According to the *Book of the Scolies* by the Syrian heresiologue Bar-Konal, this was the poetic cosmogony of the Koukeens:

> God was born from the sea situated on the Earth of Light, which they call the Lively Sea. The Sea of Light and the Earth are more ancient than God.
>
> When God was born from the Lively Sea, he sat on the waters, looked at them, and in them saw his own image. He extended his hand, seized (the image), seized it as a companion, was in love with it and would engender with it a crowd of gods and goddesses.

The idea of a God in love with his reflection, with his Spirit, with his Wisdom or Sophia, was not foreign to Judeo-Christian speculations on the nature of the *Angelos-Christos.*

The position of the Nicolaites appeared closer to Essenism:

> The Darkness (the abyss and the waters), rejected by the unengendered Spirit, rises up, furious, to attack it; this struggle produces a kind of matrix that, for the Spirit, engenders four Eons, which engender fourteen more; after which the 'right' and 'left,' light and darkness, are formed. One of the superior powers emanates from the Spirit, Barbelo, the

[122] *Ibid.,* p. 103.

> Celestial Sea, engendered the bad entity (Ialdabaoth or Sabaoth), creator of this lower world; but, repenting, it used its beauty to create salvation, from the inferior cosmos.[123]

A rumor has it that the Nicolaites, a name that comes from a Bishop Nicolas, the governor of their community, were made the object of a polemic to which the Greek text of the *Apocalypse attributed to John* bears witness. If one remembers that a person with the same name, John, took for himself a Gospel originally derived from a Naassene *midrash,* it is not improbable that, at the end of the First Century — while the Judeo-Christian philosophers such as Cerinthe, Satornil and the partisans of Saul/Paul confronted each other in Ephesus, Antiochus, Pergame, Alexandria and Corinthe — a programme of Esseno-Christian reunification that exluded the old forms of Naassenism was added to the text of the Jewish original. The text of the *Revelations* (2, 6, and 15–16) notably attacks the Nicolaites who were influential in Ephesus and Pergame, where they seemed to have striven to reconcile Naassenism and Essenism.

In all probability, the Perates constituted a later branch of the Naassenes. In his study of WAW, the Hebraic letter that symbolizes the Messiah, Dupont-Sommers derives their name from the Greek word *paratai,* the "traversers," those who cross the waters of corruption.[124] Perhaps they were confused with the Cainites, who, according to the *Elenchos,* estimated that the serpent was "the sign with which God marked Cain to prevent him from being killed by those who encountered him" (V, 15).

In North Africa, the Naassenes of the Cainite type rallied many adepts around a prophetess named Quintilla. These adepts professed the existence of two divinities. As with Marcion much later, their Demuirge identified himself with YHWH. Cain, as much as the Serpent, is YHWH's expiatory victory: "The serpent is Cain, whom the God of this world did not agree to offer [as a sacrifice], whereas he agreed to the bloody sacrifice of Abel, because the master of this world pleases himself with blood."[125]

It is possible that the Cainites of North Africa, who were eventually absorbed by the Christianity of the New Prophecy (which was particularly influential in Carthage around 160–170), were convinced to give to their redeemer the generic name of the God who saves, Joshua/Jesus.

The sect of the Perates, which was perhaps contemporary with [the collation of] the *Elenchos,* which included them for a long time, witnessed [the birth of] a late and Hellenized Naassenism.

The author of the *Elenchos* cites two prophets, bishops or founders of communities: Euphrates the Perate and Kelbes the Karystian.

> They gave themselves the name Perates because they believed that no creature can escape the destiny that waits for all engendered beings from their birth. Because what is engendered must necessarily corrupt itself [...] We are the only ones to know the necessary laws concerning generation and the road by which man entered the world; the only ones to know exactly how to walk in it and have the power to *cross* corruption [...] Death seized the Egyptians in the Red Sea with their chariots; the Egyptians are all those who are in ignorance — that is to say, all those who have not received gnosis. The exodus [*sortie*] from Egypt was the exodus from the body; because the body, according to them, is a little Egypt; *to cross* the Red Sea is to traverse the waters of corruption, that is to say, Chronos; being from the other side of the Red Sea is to be an upstart [*parvenue*] from the other side of generation; to arrive in the desert is to find oneself outside of generation,

[123] S. Hutton, *Les gnostiques,* Paris, 1976.
[124] A. Dupont-Sommer, *La doctrine gnostique de la lettre WAW,* Paris, 1961.
[125] Leisegang, *op. cit.,* p. 104.

> there where the god of perdition and the God of salvation find each other at the same time. The gods of perdition are the stars, which impose on other engendered beings the fatality of a variable generation (*Elenchos,* V, 16, 1 and 4).[126]

The interpretation that Simon of Samaria applied to the texts of the Bible finds itself here, but made from within the scorn for the body that is common to [all] the religions.

The Redeeming and Perfect Serpent was opposed to the serpents that inoculate [with] death.

> It isn't only the Logos as primordial power issued from the Father who is the Serpent; the diverse powers that rule the terrestrial world are all serpents. Moses called the stars the serpents of the desert, which bite and kill those who want to cross the Red Sea. Also Moses showed to the children of Israel who had been bitten by the serpents in the desert the true and perfect Serpent; those who have faith in him would not be bitten in the desert, that is to say, by the powers. Thus, no one can save nor defend those who left Egypt, that is to say, from the body and this world, if it isn't the Perfect Serpent that is filled with all plentitude. Those who put in him his hope would not be destroyed by the Serpents of the desert, that is to say, by the gods of generation. This is what is written in the book of Moses. The Serpent is the power that was attached to Moses, the Virgin who changes into a serpent. (*) The serpents of the magicians of Egypt, that is to say, the gods of perdition, resisted the power of Moses. But his rod [*verge*] overcame them and destroyed them all. The serpent that embraces the universe is the wise Logos of Eve. It is the mystery of Eden; it is the sign with which God marked Cain to prevent him from being killed by anyone who encountered him. The serpent is Cain whom the God of this world would not agree to offer, whereas he agreed to the bloody sacrifice of Abel, because the master of this world takes pleasure in blood. It is the serpent that, in the last days, in the time of Herod, appeared in a human form (**) in the image of Joseph, who was sold by the hands of his brothers and who was only dressed in a mottled robe. He is in the image of Esau, whose robe received benediction, although he was absent, and who did not receive the blind benediction, but enriched himself from beyond without receiving anything from the blind, whose face Jacob saw 'as a man sees the face of God' (*Genesis,* 33, 10). It is of the serpent that it is said: 'Like Nemrod the Giant, hunter for the Eternal' (*Genesis,* 10, 9). He had many adversaries, and also there were great numbers of serpents who would bite the children of Israel in the desert and whose bites were cured by the Perfect Serpent that Moses would raise in the midst of them […] It is in his image that the bronze serpent was elevated by Moses in the desert. (***) He is the only one for whom the celestial constellation is visible everywhere. It is the great 'beginning' of which Scripture speaks. It is of him that it is said: In the beginning was the Logos and the Logos was at the side of God and the Logos was God. It was in the beginning at the side of God, all was made by Him and nothing was made without him. What was made by him is life. (****) It is by him that Eve was made, Eve is life. This Eve is 'the mother of all the living' (*Genesis,* 3, 20), nature is common to all, that is to say, the mother of the gods and the angels, the immortals and the mortals, beings without reason and beings endowed with reason (*****) (*Elenchos,* V, 16, 6 *sq.*).

[126]Following Leisegang, *op. cit.,* p. 101.

(*) The serpent as principle of pleasure — defined as perdition by the Perates — was vanquished by the phallic symbolism of the staff of commandment.

(**) The Serpent incarnated in human form is evoked in the Semitic substrata of the *Gospel attributed to John,* before it — like Melchizedek, Seth or the Master of Justice — assumed the name Joshua/Jesus. The image of the crucified Serpent would be perpetuated in alchemical representations.

(***) Cf. the text of the *Gospel attributed to John*: "And as Moses raised a serpent in the desert, thus it is necessary that the Son of Man be raised" (3, 14).

(****) Which one finds in the same *Gospel* (1, 1–3). The *Apocryphon of John* also shared in this Naassenean or Peratean literature.

(*****) Eve as the principle of life and universal mother was also accredited by the Barbelites.

Facing the Logos, like the serpent standing up straight, matter curls upon itself; it was figured under the symbol of water, which one also encounters among the Naassenes:

> Corruption is water and nothing destroys the cosmos as rapidly as water; water extends itself under the spherical form of the world. It is Chronos (understood to be the external planetary sphere of Saturn, that which encloses all the others). It is a power the color of water and, from this power, that is to say, from Chronos, no creature can escape, because it is thanks to Chronos that all creatures incur corruption and no generation has a place that doesn't have Chronos as an obstacle along its route. It is the meaning of the verse of poetry concerning the gods. 'I can attest to the earth, the vault of the heavens that cover it and the deadly waters of the Styx. It is the sermon of the immortals gods' (*Odyssey,* V, 184 *sq.*).

The *Elenchos* quotes a fragment of a Perate hymn:

> I am the voice of the awakening in the eternal night. I now begin to deliver the power to control the veils of chaos. The power of the abysmal clay that takes and carries the mold of the eternal and silent humidity; the entire power, always in movement, of the aqueous convulsions that carry what is in repose, retain what flickers, liberate what comes, relieve what reposes, destroy what believes, the loyal guardian of the trace of the airs, she that enjoys what is poured on the order of the twelve eyes, that reveals the Seal to the power that rules the places of the invisible water, the power that has been called the sea. This power, which ignorance has called Chronos, Chronos who was enchained when he closed the trickle of the thick and nebulous, obscene and dark Tartar [River] (*Elenchos* V, 14, 1–2).

The syncretism of the Perates was not content with harmonizing the Greek and Hebraic mythologies; it incorporated into its doctrine of salvation an astrological speculation, also present in Essenism, as in the Christianities of Bardesane and Priscilla.

The universe and the individual knew an experience subjected to astral influences that the Perates identified with the power of the Archons, agents of the Demiurge. The art of the Serpent-Logos consisted in escaping from it.

> In the same way that the stars tend towards the center of the world so as to move away again, thus the entire Creation moves away from its center, the Divinity, so as to make its return. The fall is designated by the left side of circular movement; ascension is on the right side. The heavens themselves offer a great fresco of the combat between the Logos,

> the Good and Perfect Serpent, and the master of this world, the Bad Serpent. The Logos is figured by the constellation of the Dragon; it has on the right and left sides of its head the Crown and the Lyre. Before the Dragon is kneeling the 'pitiful' man, the constellation of Hercules, who touches the end of the right foot of the Dragon. Behind him, the Bad Master of the world, the constellation of the Serpent, approaches so as to ravish the Crown, but the Serpent Eater [*Serpentaire*] encloses it and prevents it from touching it (*Elenchos,* V, 16, 14–16).

(The theme of the two serpents is evoked in the *Book of Isaiah,* 27,1.)

Still later, Ephiphane of Salamine brought to those whom he called "Ophites" a eucharist in honor of the Serpent-Redeemer. Certain sects practice it to this day.

> They pile bread on the table; they summon a serpent that they elevate as a sacred animal. One opens the cage, the serpent comes out, gains the table, unfolds itself among the bread and, they say, transforms itself into the Eucharist. Then they break the bread upon which the serpent has crawled and distribute the parts to the communicants. Each one kisses the serpent on the mouth, because the serpent was tamed by the incantation and they prostrate themselves before an identical animal. It is by the serpent, they say, that they send a hymn to the Father on high. Such is their manner of celebrating their mysteries (Epiphanius, *Panarion,* XXXVII, 5).

From the serpent of the lustful temptation to the *Ophis-Christos,* passing through the phallic and magic rod of Hermes-Trismegist, the ancient totemism of the animal that coils, interwines, wriggles, penetrates, unites and ejaculates venom or life was spiritualized and entered into religious stereotypes without losing its ambiguous nature.

Uprooted from its original androgyny — which certain Naassenian groups hostile to puritanism celebrated — the *ophis* was made Redeemer Messiah and Destroyer Messiah, Virgin of iron and terror who reigns over nature, the beasts and women, so as to impose on the world the order of pure renunciation, incarnated in Jesus, and the order of pure repression, incarnated in Satan, the *alter ego* of the Messiah.

Perhaps it was also through the bias of the *Ophis-Christos* that the cult of Hermes-Logos that the Greeks called *agathephoros,* carrier of good (as the *agathodaimon*), and that offered itself to the popular veneration of the erect phallus, succumbed to a kind of castration.

Whatever it was, Essene asceticism invaded the Greco-Roman world, propagated in it the frenzied taste for continence, mortification and the martryed body, under the antagonistic species of Marcionism and Montanism.

But as much as the rod of Moses was substituted for the "golden staff of Hermes," the rites of sexual fusion undertook a vivacity sometimes less clandestine than one would suppose, since Epiphanius of Salamis would encounter the Barbelites, who called themselves "Christians," thereby restoring to the word its sense of "messianist." Their Messiah did not call himself Jesus, but Barbelo.

At the end of the Fourth Century, Priscilla of Avila would not judge it useless to make it still more precise: "God is not Armaziel, Mariaumne, Joel, Balsamus, nor Barbilon, he is the Christ Jesus" (*Corpus eccles. latin.,* XVIII, 29). Mariaumne was the Mother-Spirit-Sophia-Virgin and Mother of the Naassenes. Barbilon was Barbelo, the spermatophagic and redeeming divinity of the Barbelites.

Justin the Gnostic and the *Book of Baruch*

Towards the end of the Second Century, Justin the Gnostic — a Greek who was familiar with the Jewish texts and the master of an esoteric school in which instruction was dispensed under the seal of the secret — drafted the *Book of Baruch,* of which the *Elenchos* conserved extracts. (It isn't impossible that Justin frequented the milieu of Kabbalistic Jews who, under the cover of Pharisian obedience, perpetuated and amplified the gnosis of the Hermetic groups of Egypt and Asia Minor.)

The *Book of Baruch* offers an example of Judeo-Greek syncretism, quite different from that of Justin's contemporary, Marcion, elaborated by being based on Saul/Paul.

Justin refers to a myth, reported by Herodotus, according to which Heracles made love with a being who was half-young woman, half-serpent, who gave him three children. He drew from this a trinitarian theology:

> 'There are three unengendered Principles of the All': two are masculine, one is feminine. The first masculine principle is called the Good; he is the only one to carry the name and he possesses a universal presence; the second is called the Father of all things, he is deprived of prescience, unknowable and invisible. The feminine principle is also deprived of prescience, it is irascible, it has a double spirit and a double body and absolutely resembles the being from the myth of Herodotus, a young woman up to the sex[ual organs], a serpent above. This young woman also calls herself Eden and Israel. Such are the Principles of the All, the Roots and the sources from which all existence issues; there aren't any others. The Father saw this half-woman, Eden, fell in love with her, ignorant that she was from the future. This Father calls himself Elohim. Eden fell in love with Elohim, and desire united them in the pleasure of love. From this union, the Father had twelve angels. Here are the names of the twelve angels of the Father: Michael, Amen, Baruch, Gabriel, Esaddea … (the seven other names are missing from the manuscripts). The names of the maternal angels born to Eden are the following: Babel, Achamoth, Naas, Bel, Belias, Satan, Sael, Adonea, Kanithan, Pharaoth, Karkamenos, and Lathen. Of the twenty-four angels, some (the angels of the Father) serve the Father and do his bidding; the maternal angels serve Eden. The ensemble of these angels form the Paradise of which Moses spoke: God planted a garden towards the East (*Genesis,* 2, 8), that is to say, opposite Eden, so that Eden would always be able to see Paradise, to know the angels. The angels are allegorically named the trees of this paradise: the Tree of Life is Baruch, the third of the paternal angels; the Tree of the Science of Good and Evil is Naas, the third of the maternal angels. It is thus, he says, that it is necessary to explain the words of Moses; Moses veiled his expression because everyone wasn't capable of comprehending the truth. When Paradise was constituted by the love of Elohim and Eden, the angels of Elohim prayed a little to the most noble of the earth, that is to say, not the beastial parties of Eden, but the noble regions of the earth, those that are placed below the sex and are similar to man and they made man. The beastial parties serve the savage beasts and the other animals. They made man as a symbol of the amorous union of Elohim and Eden, and they mirrored their powers in him, Eden the soul and Elohim the *pneuma.* Here is how Adam is like the seal, the pledge of the love and eternal symbol of the wedding of Eden and Elohim. Moreover, Eve was made, as Moses wrote, for being an image and a symbol, so as to conserve in her the imprint of Eden for all eternity. And likewise in the image that Eve is, Eden deposited

the soul and Elohim the *pneuma.* The commandment: 'Increase and multiply, and fill the world' (*Genesis,* 1, 28), that is to say, Eden. Such is the meaning of the Scripture. At his marriage, Eden gave to Elohim all of his power by way of fortune. It is to the example of this first marriage that women, to this day, still give a dowry to their spouses, loyal in this way to the divine law of the first parents, observed the first time by Eden with regard to Elohim. When all was created as Moses describes it, the heavens and the earth and all the creatures that it contained, the twelve angels of the Mother divided themselves into 'four principles' and each of these four parties bore the name of a river: Pison, Gihon, Tigress and Euphrates, as it was written by Moses. The dozen angels, distributed among the four groups, wandered the world in every sense and were invested with a lieutenance over the Cosmos by Eden. They never remained in the same place, but, as in a round, they made the rounds, changing place without cease and, at regular intervals, ceding the places that had been attributed to them.

When Pison ruled over a region, famine, distress and tribulations made their appearance, because this group of angels bring with them a period of avarice. Moreover, each part of the world is the theater of plagues and sicknesses that follow the power and nature of the groups that dominate it. This deluge of evil, which varies with the group that dominates, ceaselessly enlaces the universe in its inexhaustable wave, following the decree of Eden. Here is how this fatality of evil is instaurated. After having constructed and fashioned the world through his love affairs, Elohim wanted to regain the superior regions of the heavens to see that nothing was missing from his creation and he took with him his respective angels; because his nature carried him towards the High but wanted to leave Eden here below, because Eden, being earth, did not want to accompany the ascension of her spouse. Reaching to the frontiers of the heavens, Elohim saw a light more powerful than the one he had created; he said, 'Open for me the doors so that I may enter and praise the Savior; because I have believed in the Savior' (deformed citation of *Psalms,* 118, 19). From the heart of the light, a voice responded: 'Here is the door to the Savior, the just can pass through it' (*ibid.,* 20). As soon as the door opened, and the Father (Elohim) entered among the Good without his angels and he saw what the eyes do not see, what the ears can not hear and what the heart of man can not conceive. Then to Good said to him: 'Sit on my right' (*Psalms,* 110, 1). But the Father said to the Good: 'Savior, let me destroy the Cosmos that I created; because my *pneuma* remains imprisoned in man. I would like to reclaim it.' The Good responded: 'Now that you are close to me, you can no longer do evil; by your reciprocal love, you and Eden, you made the world; thus leave Eden to enjoy the creation for as long as it pleases her; as for you, remain close to me.' Seeing herself abandoned by Elohim, Eden cried to assemble around herself her own angels and dressed herself splendidly in the hope that Elohim would again fall in love with her and re-descend towards her. But Elohim, who found himself under the authority of the Good, did not descend towards Eden. Then the one [Eden] commanded Babel, who is Aphrodite, to provoke the adulterous and divorced men; she had been separated from Elohim: she wanted that the *pneuma* that dwells in man be tortured by sad separations and suffer, as she herself did from the fact of her abandonment. And Eden gave to Naas, her third angel, a great power and the mission to punish in all ways the *pneuma* of Elohim that lives in men; she thus punished Elohim in his *pneuma* because he had abandoned his wife, despite

giving his word. The Father Elohim would send Baruch, his third angel, to aid the *pneuma* that resides in every man. Upon his arrival, Baruch would place himself in the midst of the angels of Eden, that is to say, the milieu of Paradise (because Paradise is the angels in their milieu) and command to the men: 'You can eat from all the Trees of Paradise, but you can not eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Bad,' which is the serpent, that is to say, you will obey the other eleven angels of Eden, because they carry the passions, they do not carry injustice. The serpent approached Eve, seduced her and committed adultery with her, which is contrary to the Law; then he approached Adam and committed the act of pederasty with him, which is also against the Law. It was from that moment that adultery and pederasty existed. It was from then that evil and good have ruled over men; the two have the same origin, the Father, Elohim. Actually, by elevating himself toward the Good, the Father showed the way to those who would like to climb; by descending toward Eden, he was at the origin of evil for the *pneuma* that is in man. Baruch was thus sent to Moses and, thanks to Moses, he apprised the children of Israel of the means of returning to the Good. But the third angel of Eden, Naas, who, by the soul issued from Eden, lived by Moses as in all other men, suffocated the prescriptions of Baruch to his own profit. This is why, on the one hand, the soul is subjected to the *pneuma* and, on the other hand, the *pneuma* is subjected to the soul. Because the soul is Eden; the *pneuma* is Elohim; the one and the other find themselves among all the other human beings, men and women. Then Baruch, sent to the prophets so that the *pneuma* that lives in man could hear the prophets, tore himself away from the bad works of the body, as the Father Elohim had done. This time, Naas, with the help of the soul that, with the *pneuma* of the Father, lives in man, led the prophets astray; all let themselves to be bribed and they did not obey the words that Elohim had confided to Baruch. Finally, Elohim chose a prophet from the milieu of the uncircumcised and he sent him to combat the twelve angels of Eden and to deliver the Father from the twelve bad angels of the creation. They were the twelve labors of Hercules, labors that he accomplished in order, from the first to the last, by fighting the lion, the hydra, the wild boar, etc. They are here, the names that strangers to the faith have given to the angels to express metaphorically the particular activity of each of the angels of the sea. While he seemed to have succeeded in putting them all down, he banded together with Omphalos, who is none other than Babel, Aphrodite; the one who seduced Hercules and disrobed him of his power, which consisted in the commandments that Elohim had confided to Baruch and she, in exchange, dressed him in her robe, that is to say, in the power of Eden, the power of below. Thus miscarrying the prophetic mission and the labors of Hercules. Finally, in the days of King Herod, Baruch was once again sent here-below by Elohim (*Elenchos,* V).

The following offers a typical example of interpolation. At the earliest, it dates from the Fourth Century, since Nazareth didn't exist before that.

Having come to Nazareth, he found there Jesus, the Son of Joseph and Mary, a child of twelve years, occupied with tending his sheep; he revealed to him all of the history of Eden and Elohim since the beginning, thus the future, and he said to him: 'All the prophets who have come before you have let themselves be seduced; thus tasked [you are] Jesus, Son of Man, with not letting yourself be seduced, but to announce the Word

> to men, communicate to them the message touching upon the Father and the Good, then climb toward the Good and sit you there, at the side of Elohim, our Father to all.' Jesus obeyed the angel and said: 'Savior, I will do all this,' and he began to preach. Naas also wanted to seduce him but he escaped, because Jesus was loyal to Baruch. Furious with not being able to lead Jesus astray, Naas crucified him. But Jesus would leave on the cross the body of Eden and climbed toward the Good. He said to Eden: 'Woman, take your son,' that is to say, the psychical man and the terrestrial man. Then he remitted his *pneuma* between the hands of the Father and he elevated himself toward the Good (*Elenchos,* V, 26).

It is with pertinence that Leisegang detected in Justin and his mythology the echoes of an amorous torment, hypostasized as a cosmic drama. I leave the word to the exegetes. Their sympathy for the vindictive man and his antipathy for women accords with the sentimental interest that is witnessed in Justin, showing quite well the sensual origin of all *hairesis,* of all choices that are supposedly religious or ideological.

> The amorous desire and its satisfaction: such is the key to the origin of the world. The disillusions of love and the vengeance that follows them, such is the secret of all evil and egotism that exists on the earth. The entire history of the world and humanity must become a love story. We look for ourselves, we find ourselves, we separate, we torture ourselves, then, finally, faced with a more acute pain, we renounce: here is the eternal mystery of love with the contradiction, intrinsic to love, that makes us desire to be delivered from women and the feminine. All this marks a fine intelligence of the essential differences that separate man and woman. The tragedy of the destiny of the universe begins with the amorous impulse that carries its Creator to quit the domain of the Good. By descending toward Eden, who watches for him, Elohim is charged with the first fault, into which entered a free decision and, at the same time, a natural instinct. If one considers that he left his woman, that he did not descend from the heavens to return to her, that he repented of the consequences of his love and wanted to destroy all that issued from his, his guilt is enormous. Though his conduct had a good appearance, from the angle of the earth, a frightful infidelity was much less culpable than the conduct and the vengeance of Eden, in which she found a partial justification. One thinks of a remark by Nietzsche: 'That man fears the woman who loves: she will not recoil before any sacrifice, and all the rest will appear to her as without value. That man fears the woman who hates: because man in the depths of his heart is malicious; but the woman is bad' (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* trans. G. Bianquis, Paris, Aubier, 1946, p. 153). Eden is malicious: she implements all to thwart the ceaselessly renewed efforts by Elohim to efface the evil issued from him; efforts that will end after millennia of perserverance. Also sympathy is shared between Eden and Elohim. The sadness of God before the fatal consequences of his love and the distress of the deceived woman both aim to awake the sympathy and emotions of the man who, in his poor little existence, lets himself engage in this tragedy of love and have the experience. That Elohim finally realized salvation at the cost of laborious efforts, and that Eden, bent on saying no and impeding the work of the Good, found her tragic end in an eternal abandonment and is no more than a de-spiritualized cadaver: this is the response

to the sentiment of justice, which demands the most severe punishment for irreconcilable hatred.[127]

The Adepts of Barbelo

Around 335, the young Epiphanius of Salamis, the future master-thinker of the Church and the author of a list denouncing the heresies, *Panarion kata pason ton aireseon* ("Medicine against all the heresies"), adhered to a sect that still called itself "Christian," in the Greek sense of "Messianic."

Its Christ or Messiah, named Barbelo, who was a modern emanation of the ancient Goddess-Mother, revealed herself under the traits of a *Sophia* whom would be the exaltation, not of the *pneuma* in the spiritual sense, but of the breath of life, the sensual power of the body.

Tormented by guilt, and later on converted to the frenzies of asceticism, Epiphanius overwhelmed his first co-religionists with the same indignant rage with which Augustin of Hippone repudiated the Manicheanism of which he had been a zealous partisan.

Among the books that propagated the Barbelite doctrine, Epiphanius cites the *Book of Ialdabaoth,* the *Apocalypse of Adam,* the *Gospel of Eve,* the *Book of Seth,* the *Book of Noria,* the *Prophecies of Bark-abbas* (cited by Basilides), the *Ascension of Elie,* the *Nativity of Mary,* the *Gospel of the Apostles,* the *Great and Small Interrogations of Mary,* the *Gospel of Philippe* and the *Gospel of Perfection.*

Several hypotheses have been put forth concerning the name of the Goddess. For Leisegang, it derived from the Hebrew *Barbhe Eloha,* "in four is God," an allusion to the divine tetrad, not the *tetragrammaton* YHWH, but the ancient Semitic celestial group: El the Father, the Mother, his wife, their sons and daughter, who became Father, feminine *pneuma,* Son, Messiah or Christ. Others see in it a deformation of *baal Belo* or the cult of the divinity Bel, issued from the rites of fecundity and light, still vital in Samaria despite the Yahwehist implantation, nay, an emancipation from Anath. In the *Book of Baruch* by Justin the Gnostic, the entity Babbel is identified with Aphrodite.

According to the report made by Epiphanius: "They adore a certain Barbelo who lives, they say, in the eighth heaven and who issued from the Father. She is, according to some, the mother of Ialdabaoth, according to others, the mother of Sabaoth. Her son exercises over the seventh heaven a tyrannical authority and says to her subjects: 'I am the Eternal and there isn't any other; there isn't any other God except for me'" (*Panarion,* XXV, 2 *sq.*).

The tyrannical Eternal is none other than YHWH, the God of the Judeans, identified by anti-Judean Jewish gnosis and then by Hellenic gnosis with the Demiurge, the bloody God, popularized under the name Ialdabaoth or Sabaoth; he presides over the destinies of the irremediably bad world. That YHWH-Ialdabaoth was the son of the Goddess-Mother here recalls the eviction of the cults of the Woman and Mother by the patriarchy that acceded to power with neolithic agriculture.

By understanding such words, Barbelite mythology says, the mother of the divine despot decided to save humanity from the miserable lot to which God reduced it. How did she resolve to restore the power that an odious son has stripped away? By ruse and seduction. She presented herself to the Archons, the servants of the Savior, in the voluptuous majesty of her femininity and, having excited their desires, received their sperm "so as to thus restore her power, disseminated in different beings" (*Panarion,* XXV, 2 *sq*).

The faithful to Barbelo thus imitated the saving gesture of the Goddess and, with the good conscience of an offering, abandoned themselves to the pleasure of making flow — in place of the blood

[127] *Ibid.,* p. 115.

that so many religions shed — the sperm and the *cyprine* of which the emission revives the energy of the *Natura Magma.*

In a passage that much later would inspire the inquisitors who accused the Cathar and Vaudois ascetics of debauchery, Epiphanius reports the use of a sign of recognition, attested to by the Messalians, Beghards and Beguines, and which — before the hedonist fashion of sexual liberties of the Twentieth Century — was long perpetuated among the young people, who indicated, by a caress in the palm of the hand, the imperious character of their desire:

> They have, from men to women and from women to men, a sign of recognition that consists, when they give their hands so as to greet each other, in practicing a kind of tickling in the palm of the hand if the new-comer belongs to their religion. As soon as they recognize each other, they have a banquet. They serve delicious food, eat meat and drink wine, even the poor ones. When they have banqueted well, and have, if I may say so, filled their veins with a surplus of power, they move on to debauchery. The man leaves his place at the side of his woman by saying to her: 'Raise yourself and accomplish the love feast [*agape*] with the brother.'

The Christian Churches claiming Thomas for themselves allowed an amorous relation between Jesus and Salome: "Salome said: 'Who are you, man; from whom do you (issue) to be on top of my bed and to have eaten at my table?'" (*Logion,* 65, the *Hidden Words that Jesus the Living said to Didyne Jude Thomas,* popularly known under the title *Gospel of Thomas*). In the same order of ideas, the *First Epistle attributed to John* (3, 9) declares: "Whomever is born from God does not commit sin, because the sperm of God lives in him; and he can not sin because he is born from God. From this one can recognize the children of God and the children of the Devil."

The man and the woman take care to receive the sperm between their hands and they pledge it to the Goddess-Mother so that she can fortify life in the world and also in them.

The sect frequented by Epiphanius offers an example of an archaic belief of the orgiastic type that was degraded by successive syncretisms; even the Christianity erected since Nicaea as the religion of the State was impregnated by the currents in which it was at first formulated before being decanted as a political and theological doctrine. Many tendencies fundamentally hostile to Christianity would survive by adapting themselves with more or less flexibility to the norms imposed by Rome (the recuperation of the Celtic or Slavic mythologies, incorporated into the cult of the saints is in this regard exemplary, as Robert Graves has shown).[128]

In the case of the Barbelites, tardily denounced by Epiphanius, perhaps communion of the Christian type replaced the homage formerly rendered to the "breath of life," such that it strongly expressed amorous pleasure. As Leisegang recalls, "the word *pneuma* is immediately tied to the evocation of a spermatic, genesic [*genesique*] matter. At the beginning, the *pneuma* had absolutely nothing to do with spirit; it was the 'wind,' is was a 'hot air.' The conception following which it is a *pneuma*-wind, and not a *pneuma*-spirit, which engenders human life, is encountered in the Greek tradition…"[129]

In the idea of a *sperma,* generator of life, of a substance that creates man and the world, is not absent from the Greek translation of "Spirit" by *pneuma,* such as it appears in the Old and New Testaments, but, little by little, it obliterated the most unacceptable elements for a society dominated by religion:

[128]R. Graves, *La Deesse blanche,* Paris, 1986.
[129]Leisegang, *op. cit.,* p. 133.

the act of self-creation, the creation of the world and aleatorily of the child that conceals in its substance the amorous union of man and woman. The masked reality ironically resurgent among the few playful stoics and the voluntarily castrated Origen under the traits of the *logos spermatikos* became, in Saint-Sulpician imagery, the language of fire in the Pentecost.

As for the Barbelites, man and woman possessed in their own semen the *pneuma,* the breath of God. And the individual approaches the divine essence all the more that he or she irradiates from his or her spermatic power and the dispensation of a fusional orgasm.

"To unite oneself with God," Leisegang specifies, "one must mix and melt one's semen with the generating substance of the All. Salvation consists in removing one's semen from terrestrial destination and leading it back to the celestial source of all semen."[130]

Here is what Epiphanius of Salamis reports about the group in which was an adept:

> They offer to the Father, to the Nature of the All, what they have in their hands by saying: 'We offer to you this gift, the body of the Christ.' Then they eat it and commune in their own ignominy, by saying: 'Here is the body of the Christ, here is the Easter for which our bodies suffer and are constrained to confess the passion of the Christ.' They moreover do it with the menses of the woman. They gather the blood of impurity and commune in the same way. And they say: 'Here is the blood of the Christ.' When they read in the *Revelations* 'I see a tree that has twelve times the fruit of the year, and it says to me: it is the tree of life,' they allegorically interpret it as the flux of menstrual blood of the woman.

Epiphanius did not understand or didn't want to understand that the Christ, the Messiah of the Barbelites, is not Joshua/Jesus, but Barbelo, whom Priscilla would call Barbilon.

When Barbelo gave birth to the odious breed of the Eternal — YHWH-Ialdabaoth-Sabaoth (also called Kalakau) — she revoked her status as mother so as to be celebrated as the woman impregnated by the pleasure and love that she dispenses. Also the Barbelites resorted to a form of voluntary interruption of pregnancy, which didn't lack salt:

> When one among them, by surprise, has let his semen penetrate too early and the woman is pregnant, listen to what they make still more abominable. They extirpate the embryo as soon as they can seize it with their fingers, they take this runt, crush it in a kind of mortar, mix in it honey, pepper and different condiments, as well as perfumed oils, so as to conjure up distaste, then they reunite themselves […] and each communes with his fingers in this runt paste. The human meal completed, they conclude with this prayer to God: 'We have not allowed the Archon of voluptuousness to play with us, but we have corrected the error of the Father.' This is, to their eyes, the perfect Easter […] Then, in their meetings, they enter into ecstasy, they smear their hands with […] their seminal emmissions, they extend them and, their hands thus sullied and their bodies entirely naked, they pray to obtain through this action free access to God. Men and women, they polish their bodies day and night with salves, baths and spices, and they devote themselves to sleep and drinking. They curse someone who is fasting by saying: 'It is not necessary to abstain, because fasting is the work of the Archon that created Eon. (*) It is, on the conrary, necessary to nourish oneself so that bodies are powerful and capable of carrying fruit in their time' (**) (*Panarion,* XXVI, 4–5).

[130] *Ibid.,* pp. 135 and 136.

(*) That is to say, the God who created the world (the Aeon). The expression "Aeon" is frequently found in the letters presumed to have been written by Paul, but the translators unfailingly made it their duty to render it as "world," "century," or "epoch," so as to avoid the Gnostic connotation.

(**) The *Gospel of the Egyptians* also justifies the refusal to engender children: "And Marie-Salome demanded of the Savior: 'Master, when will the reign of Death end?' And Jesus responded: 'When you women no longer make babies… When you have deposed the garments of shame and ignominy, when the two become one, when the male and the female become one, when there is no longer man or woman, that's when the reign of Death will end…' Salome responded: 'Have I thus done well, Master, by not being a mother?' And Jesus said: 'Eat all the fruits, but from what is bitter (maternity), do not eat anything'" (quoted by Clement of Alexandria, *Stromates,* III, IX, 66, and by the *Second Epistle to the Church of Corinthe* attributed to Clement).

In what it presents of the most radical, the Barbelite doctrine was related to the teachings of Simon of Samaria: the body is the earth of which the creative power merits the exclusive attention of men. The goal is the fusion of the me and the world, but, whereas Simon identified the consciousnesness of pleasure and the consciousness of self-creation, the Barbelites, obeying the religious solicitation, ended in a mystical vision of pleasure that, in the last instance, is an homage to the *soma* of the Spirit and the divine.

Barbelo, orgiastic Goddess and sucker of the universal sperm, turns — as in Tantrism — the pleasures of life into a celestial duty, voluptuousness into ritual obligation. Therefore the ignoble is not sensuality consumed as communion in sperm and abnormal excitability [*erethisme*], but the amorous exaltation is travestied as an ejaculation of the sacred.

The Barbelite religion fomented a theology quite anterior to that which Catholicism would impose after Nicaea.

Two forces were opposed: the Good God, of whom Barbelo is the emanation, and the God who created the bad world. By the road of orgasm, Barbelo led man back to the Kingdom of Light, from which the Demiurge was exiled so as to enslave it to its odious authority.

> In the beginning was the Darkness, the Abysss and the Water; the *pneuma* was among them and separated one from the other. But the Darkness became angry and grumbled about the Spirit; it advanced but the *pneuma* seized it and impregnated a being by the name of *metra* (matrix). Once born, this being was impregnated by the same *pneuma.* From the matrix came four Aeons, from the four Aeons came fourteen others and there was a left and a right matrix, Light and Darkness. Much later, after all those who preceded it, there appeared a deformed Aeon; this united with the *metra* that manifested itself in the heights and it is from this frightful Aeon that originally came the Gods, angels, demons and the seven spirits (*Panarion,* XXV, 5).
>
> The *Book of Noria* — who is no longer a daughter of Adam, as among the Ophites, but the wife of Noah — recounts that Noria did not enter the Ark, because she wanted to kill the Creator of this world with the rest of humanity: because she did not serve this Creator but the superior powers and Barbelo, the enemy of the Archon. Three times Noria set fire to the Ark; from which it is necessary to conclude that 'what was stolen from the Mother of the heights by the Archon who created this world and the other gods, angels and demons, we must gather together from the power that is in the body, by means of the seminal emissions of man and woman' (*Panarion,* XXVI, 1, 8–9).

It is in the *Gospel of Eve* that the fusional aspiration of the Barbelites appears with an astonishing poetry, this identity of the me and the world that offers in the flash of pleasure the irradiating presence of love:

> I hold myself on a high mountain and I see a man of great stature and another, reduced [*rabougri*] (it is a question of the Good God and Barbelo, shriveled and decreased by the fear of its power), and I heard as a voice of thunder, and I advanced so as to listen and it said to me:
>
> > I am you and you are me
> > and where you are, I am,
> > and in all things I am inseminated.
> > And if you want it, you can gather me together
> > And if you gather me together, you gather yourself together, as well

(*Panarion,* XXVI, 3, 11).

Chapter 8: Three Esseno-Christian Christs: Seth, Melchizedek, and Joshua/Jesus

The diverse sects of the movement that was given the general name of Essenism inscribed at the top rank of their preoccupations — which were conferred a dramatic reality by the Zealot movement — the question of the Messiah, the envoy in whom God would confide the care of leading the people towards a promised new earth.

Due to their collaboration with the [Roman] occupiers, the Pharisians disapproved of Messianic speculations, and in particular those that, hoping for the reincarnation of Adam or one of his sons, claimed that the first man was a partner of God and took part in the creation of the world. For them, no Messiah — infatuated with some power — could arrogate any right or function exclusively reserved for Adonai, the Savior, the Creator. Adam chose evil and the Pharisians stigmatized as *minim* (Gnostic) anyone who affirmed that Adam repented, chose God and was saved, as the *Epistula apostolorum* claims.

"There existed Jewish traditions about Adam that represented him as the Vice-Regent of God, installed like a king in a sphere beyond the world and imposing his domination on the entirety of creation. Several rabbis perceived the danger of contradiction and attempted to check the most perilous of these positions."[131] Soon there was a struggle between rabbis and groups that claimed to valorize Adam as the essence of the Messiah, nay, as the Father of the Messiah who was called the Son of Man.

Many Essene factions supported the thesis of an Adam seated on God's right [hand], redeemer of the human genre and, at the same time, Co-Regent of God, which was a proposition that was inadmissible to Yahwehist monotheism, but that shows through in certain letters [claimed to be] by Saul/Paul.

The *Letter to the Colossians* (1, 15) makes the Christ a pre-existing agent of God in the creation. "The Messiah is called 'Image of God' and 'The Head of the Body,' which originally signified the entire universe (the 'Church' is almost surely an addition to destroy the parallelism between the hymn and the couched [*presentee*] cosmic vision)."[132] This is an example of one of a number of falsifications of the letters of Saul/Paul by his copyists and translators. These falsifications were intended to make the reader forget that Saul had already belonged to Jewish Gnosticism.

Nevertheless, the name of the Messiah varied according to the sects; therefore the name was precisely what conferred power to the community or Church. A fragment from an apocryphal *Book of Daniel* discovered at Qumran insists on the expectation of a savior delegated by God and carrying the Name: "He will be called the Son of the Great God and by his Name he will be named. He will be greeted as the Son of God, one will call him the Son of the Most-High."[133]

The quarrel about the secret name of the Son of God: is Adam reincarnated or the son of Adam, the Son of Man? The *Testament of Abraham,* a text of Jewish origin from the First Century after the

[131] Fossum, *op. cit.,* p. 297.

[132] *Ibid.,* p. 307.

[133] J. A. Fitzmayer, "The Contribution of Qumran Aramaic to the Study of the New Testament," *New Testament Studies,* 20, 1973–1974, p. 391.

Christian era, describes Adam crowned in the heavens. Such is also the vision of Saul/Paul in the second *Letter to the Corinthians* (22–23), which evokes the presence of Adam in Paradise or the third heaven.

The *Apocalypse of Adam,* another text from the First Century of Judaic origin, discovered at Nag-Hammadi (Nag-Hammadi Library, V), contains the revelation of the future destiny of the Adamites, offered by Adam to his son, Seth.

For Fossum, "Adam was the first manifestation of the True Prophet."[134] Adam possessed the spirit of God, which brought knowledge (gnosis) of all things, past and future (*Homelies of Peter,* III, 17). The cycle of Adamic legend constituted the axis of Jewish speculations that turned around the nature of the Messiah. It originally explained the theme of the descent and ascension of the savior.[135]

According to the *Poimandres,* the celestial Adam was made in the form and image of God, a formulation that Saul/Paul took up when he assured [his readers] that Jesus was in the form of God.[136]

The Messiah Seth

The new Adam and Son of Man that the Ebionites and Nazarenes would baptize with the name Joshua, was, for certain Essenes, the third son of Adam, Seth. The important Sethian literature discovered at Nag-Hammadi proves that the vogue for religious syncretism didn't hesitate to absorb the doctrines of other sects, such as the Naassenes (certain Sethians estimated that the savior had triumphed over the creator by assuming the form of a serpent) and the Cainites, Seth's brother, and the sectarians attached to Joshua (the *Gospel of the Egyptians* expresses the equivalence between Seth and Joshua/Jesus). The collection at Nag-Hammadi includes a great number of Sethian works, sometimes indistinct from each other, due to the successive syncretic waves of works by Naassenes, Barbelites and Joshua/Jesus Christians: the *Three Pillars of Seth,* the *Epistle from Eugnoste* (which became *Sophia Jesus*), the *Paraphrase of Sem* (Seth), in which the mediating Spirit intervenes in the primordial struggle between Light and Darkness.[137]

Seth was born to Adam and the Virgin, Eve. Their descendants are the "spiritual," "*pneumatic*" or "perfect" Sons of the Light, who extoll asceticism and the stimulation [*l'exacerbation*] of the spirit at the expense of the body.

According to Sethian mythology — such that it is able to disentangle itself from the writings at Nag-Hammadi — Ialdabaoth (the God of *Genesis*) created a bad world. Nevertheless, in the man that he produced was perpetuated a celestial gleam that, aspiring to return to the superior place from which it issued, shows the road to salvation. Like Sophia, Barbelo and Naas, Seth is the Messiah of the Good God, superior to Ialdabaoth.

The Sethians divided history into four periods: the age of Adam, the age of Seth, the age of the first Sethians, and the present, in which the Sethians prepared the return of their Messiah. After the end of time, the Faithful, the Sons of the Light, would enter a plerome superior to the places created by the Demiurge. Because "their kingdom isn't of this world." Come from elsewhere, "allogenes," as they would say, they would return to the side of the Father, in a universe illuminated by four entities: Hermozel, Oroiael, Daveithe and Eleleth (in the same way that the Judeo-Christians selected four

[134] Fossum, *op. cit.,* p. 290.
[135] *Ibid.,* p. 312.
[136] *Ibid.*
[137] *Nag-Hammadi, Gnosticism and Early Christianity,* ed. Hedrick and Hodgson, 1988, pp. 55–86.

angels: Michael, Raphael, Bagriel and Ouriel, the Catholics would place four canonical gospels under four symbols that doubled the names Mark, Matthew, Luke and John: the eagle, the lion, the bull and the man).

The Messiah Seth announces the return to the "other world." The race of Seth, Puech says of Seth's sons and their descendents, are "another" race, a foreign or strange race in the strong senses of the terms.[138] (Strounsa thinks that the famous Elisha ben Abuya — who was condemned by Jewish orthodoxy at the beginning of the Second Century because he rejected the Talmud and therefore became *aher,* "other," "stranger/foreigner," "allogene" — was a member of the Sethians.[139] *Sperma eteron* translates *zera aher.*) This idea was shared by other Christian sects, including those devoted to Joshua/Jesus, whose adepts, to the great scandal of the Greeks and Romans — for whom all of the religions assumed their meaning in the citizen cult of the State — displayed the greatest scorn for death and for the punishments because they were assured of re-joining the true kingdom of light (and such was still the profession of faith of Justin the Apologist, condemned to death around 165).

The *Elenchos* quotes from extracts from a Sethian cosmogony, in which (as among the Naassenes) one perceives a religious recuperation of the attempt of Simon of Samaria to bring back to the [human] body the mythological inspiration of the *Pentateuch.* The cosmos is in the image of the belly of a pregnant woman:

> In the matrix, the innummerable imprints gave birth to the infinite multitudes of living beings. This infinite variety that bloomed in the form of different beings born under the heavens was inseminated with the odorous effluvium of the *Pneuma* that came from on high with its light and it was mixed with it. From the water surged a first-born principle, a powerful wind, impetuous, the first cause of all existence; because the wind makes the waters boil and raises them up in waves. Therefore the formation of the waves resembled the effort of the matrix to deliver itself from man or the spirit as soon as it was excited and heated by the shock of the *Pneuma.* (*) When this wave raised by the wind was elevated above the waters, it conceived and, conforming to its nature, received the fruit of the woman, it retained the light disseminated from on high with the odorous effluvium of the *Pneuma,* that is to say, the Spirit assumed various forms that are the Perfect God, descended from on high, from the Light and the unengendered *Pneuma* in human nature as in a temple, born from water by the impulse of nature and the movement of the wind, combined and mixed with the body, as salt impregnates things and the light impregnates darkness, aspiring to be free from the body that is powerless to find salvation or issue. Because what had been mixed was only a completely small glimmer, a kind of fragment separated from the luminous radiance that was introduced into the corporeal world in multiple forms and that 'retained from the depths of the great waters' (*Psalm* 29, 3), as the Psalm says. The light from on high thus had only a thought and a care: how the Spirit was to be delivered from a shameful death and the dark body, delivered from his father below, the wind that raised the whirlpooling unleashed waves, and engendered the Spirit, his perfect son but of a difference essence. Because it was a ray of this perfect light descended from on high, imprisoned in the dark waters, frightening, bitter and impure, it was the luminous *Pneuma* that was carried beyond the waters (*Genesis,* 1, 2). Thus, when the raised

[138] C. Puech, *Les Nouveaux Ecrits,* p. 127; M. Tardieu, "Les livres mis sous le nom de Seth et les sethiens de l'heresiologie," *Gnosis and Gnosticism,* NHS 8, Leiden, 1977.

[139] G. Strounsa, "Aher, a Gnostic," in *Rediscovery of Gnosticism,* II.

> waves of water conceived the fruit of the woman, they retained under all sorts of forms — such as the belly of a pregnant woman — the disseminating light, as one establishes it among all living beings. The impetuous and terrible wind, [with] its whirlpools like serpents, like winged serpents, steered it off course. (**) It is through this wind, that is to say, through the serpent, that creation began, all things having begun their generation at the same time. Thus, when the Light and the *Pneuma* were received in the chaotic matrix, which was impure and the source of corruption, the serpent, the wind of darkness, the First-Born of the waters, penetrated it and engendered man, and the impure matrix neither loved nor knew another form. The Logos from on high issued from the Light, being similar to the serpent, deceived it by this resemblance and penetrated into the impure matrix so as to break the bonds that enclosed the Perfect Spirit that had been engendered by the First-Born of the water, the serpent, the wind, the beast of the impure matrix. Such was the form of the slave; such was the necessity that obliged the Logos of God to descend into the womb of a virgin. But it did not suffice that the Perfect Man, the Logos, penetrated into the womb of a virgin and appeased in the darkness the sorrows of childbirth. After he entered into the shameful mysteries of the womb, he washed and drank from the gushing living water that must exhaust anyone who wants to divest himself of the form of the slave and assume the celestial garment (*Elenchos,* V, 19–22). (***)

(*) By an action inverse to that of Simon and his Cosmo-Somatism, the *sperma* (sperm) becomes *pneuma* (spirit); the coupling of man and woman that creates the world gives place to religious allegory, to spiritualization. The Sethians called themselves Pneumatics, in opposition to the Hylics, sons of Cain, and the Psychics, sons of Abel.

(**) The winged serpents are the *seraphim* (seraphins). As among certain Naassenes of the ascetic tendency, the Redeeming Serpent is opposed to the Serpent of Lust. Here the matrix is impure, which is the inverse of the Simonian conception.

(***) It would suffice for the sects devoted to Joshua/Jesus to translate the myth into a legend of virginal birth, embellished as a familial saga. Likewise, the triad Light, Pneuma and Darkness, *alias* the Father, the Mother (or the feminine Spirit, the Sophia/Wisdom) and the Son, would engender the future Arian and Catholic speculations on the Trinity.

The library of Nah-Hammadi surrendered a Sethian text, entitled the *Epistle of Eugnoste,* in which are clearly expressed the ideas that the Joshua/Jesus sects of the Second and Third Centuries would not have any scruples about exploiting and recuperating in the name of their mythic heroes.

> In the Infinite appeared the Father, produced by himself; he produced an androgynous man, the masculine name of whom is lost to us, but whose feminine name is Sophia-Pansophos. The immortal man himself created a great Eon with the gods and archangels: he is called: God of Gods and King of Kings; he is the Faith of the beings who produce themselves; he possesses an intelligence, an intention (*ennoia*), a thought … like the primordial being. The first celestial man, uniting with his Sophia, produced an androgynous son; the son is the first engendering Father, the Son of Man, whom one also calls: Adam of the Light. He created in his turn an Eon peopled by a multitude of angels that one names: the Ecclesia of the Luminous Saints. He united with his Sophia and produced a great an-

> drogynous light that is, in his masculine name, the Savior, the Creator of all things, and, in his feminine name, Sophia, generator of all, whom one also calls Pistis.[140]

To affirm that the Messianic sects had deformed the dogmatic message of Jesus and his apostles is to suppose that this orthodoxy had existed in the First Century and was still babbling on [*balbutiante*] in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries. With a strange complacency with respect to ecclesiastical falsification, many historians have preferred to ignore the stratification of successive syncretims that — drawing upon the doctrines of the Sethians, Naassenes, Barbelites, Elchasaites, Nazarenes and others — ended up, under the name of Joshua, offering to the federated power of the bishops a shield and a universality that was required by their political project of conquest and empire.

The *Epistle of Eugnoste* was thus cut out and recomposed on the model of a dialogue between Jesus and his disciples, so as to adopt the title *Sophia of Jesus.*[141] The prologue to the *Canonical Gospel attributed to John* was also inspired by Sethian texts.

The Messiah Melchizedek

The *Epistle to the Hebrews,* attributed to Saul/Paul by the Catholics, to Barnabas by Tertuillien and to Apollos by Luther, linked the priesthood of the Messiah Joshua-Jesus to the priesthood of Melchizedek. According to Fitzmeyer, it was addressed to the Essenes.[142]

Who was Melchizedek? For biblical mythology and orthodox Jews, he was a person of little importance, a Priest-King of Salem (Jerusalem). But the Essene texts treat him with veneration and credit him — as well as Adam and Seth (with whom he was sometimes confused) — with the vocation of Messiah.

Cave 11 at Qumran revealed a *midrash* in which Melchizedek is held as the announcer of the Good News (otherwise called the Gospels) and is none other than the Messiah for whom salvation will come.[143] Hero of the battle of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness, he would vanquish Belial, the master of evil ("He who announces the Good News is the Messiah").

Moreover, Melchizedek finds himself associated with Michael, head of the angels. Other characteristics that complete the sketch of the figure of the Archangel Michael will be of great consequence for christo-angelology. One gave to Melchizedek the name Michael and it is to him that one connects *Psalm* 11/1 and 4. He is invested with a cosmogonical function: he is the maintainer of the universe. According to *Henoch,* 69/14 *sq*: "God desposited into the hands of Michael the Secret Name by which

[140] J. Doresse, *Les Livres secrets des gnostiques d'Egypt,* p. 211. [*Translator's note*: the English translation of this portion of this text, which is called "Eugnostos the Blessed" (*The Nag Hammadi Library,* edited by James M. Robinson, revised edition: San Francisco, 1990), is as follows: "Afterward another principle came from Immortal Man, who is called 'Self-perfected Begetter.' When he received the consent of his consort, Great Sophia, he revealed that first-begotten androgyne, who is called, 'First-begotten Son of God.' Now, First-begotten, since he has his authority from his father, created angels, myriads with number, for retinue. The whole multitude of those angels are called 'Assembly of the Holy Ones, the Shadowless Lights.' Now when these greet each other, their embraces become like angels like themselves. First Begetter Father is called 'Adam of the Light.' And the kingdom of Son of Man is full of ineffable joy and unchanging jubiliation, ever rejoicing in ineffable joy over their imperishable glory, which has never been heard nor has it been revealed to all the aeons that came to be and their worlds. The Son of Man consented with Sophia, his consort, and revealed a great andryogynous Light. His masculine name is designated 'Savior, Begetter of All things.' His feminine name is designated 'Sophia, All-Begettress.' Some call her 'Pistis.'"]

[141] *Rediscovery of Gnosticism, op. cit.,* II, p. 656.

[142] J.A. Fitzmayer, p. 619.

[143] *Revue de Qumran,* VII, 1970, #27, pp. 343 *sq.*

the heavens were suspended before the world was created and for eternity; the Name by which the earth was created upon the waters and by which the profound secrets of the mountain became the beautiful waters."[144]

Furthermore, the *Zohar* makes this precise: "Everywhere you find mentioned Michael, who is the first of the angels, the Shekhina is understood."[145] Therefore, the Shekhina (or Achamoth) is none other than the Spirit, feminine in Hebrew, figured under the traits of Sophia, Mariaumne, Myriam and Mary.

The *Books of Henoch,* dear to the Essenes, call Melchizedek the Son of Man, according to the *Book of Daniel,* which would adopt the sects devoted to Joshua/Jesus so as to qualify their Messiah.[146]

Stacked up from the Second Century before the Christian era to the First Century that inaugurated it, the texts of Henoch (in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries) existed in three manuscript versions, Greek, Ethiopian and Slavic. One can distinguish an orthodox Jewish redaction, in which YHWH punishes the two hundred watchers or *egregores,* and an Esseno-Christian redaction, in which God, judging their fault to be pardonable, reconciles himself with them, which is a softening that — like the salvation accorded to Adam and the Serpent by the Sethians and Naassenes — suggests the appearance of a God of kindness who opposes his mercy to the intransigence of the God of Israel.

The miraculous birth of Melchizedek in *Henoch* announces that of Joshua-Jesus: he is engendered by a woman, without the intervention of a carnal father (the woman is the Spirit, the Shekhina/Achamoth/Sophia, Mariaumne/Myriam and, much later, the Virgin Mary). Following the *Epistle to the Hebrews* (7, 16), the Messiah endowed with the name Jesus "was not made according to the law of carnal order."

Finally, Melchizedek, whose name [as we have seen] contains an allusion to justice (*tsedeq*), participated in the Essene thematic of the Master of Justice. The *Testiment of Levy* says: "And then the Savior will raise up a New Priest to whom all the words of the Savior will be revealed, and he will exercise a judgment of truth on the earth during a multitude of days."

A manuscript from Nag-Hammadi pushes the identification much further; it evokes celestial messengers who assign to Melchizedek his future role as Great-Priest and predicts for him a destiny of Messiah condemned to undergo torments so as to triumph over death.

At the end of the Second Century, the devotes of Melchizedek would disapprove of Theodote Trapezetes, with whom they nevertheless shared the belief in an angel-messiah, an *angelos-christos.* They estimated that it was Melchizedek and not Joshua-Jesus who was the superior angel. The quarrel would reappear in the Fourth Century with Arius, who, far from being an innovator, remained loyal to the old angelo-christology, which was permitted by the ensemble of the Christian sects until the second half of the Second Century.

Werner shows that Arius interpreted the *Epistle to the Hebrews* as proof of angelo-christology (Jesus as angel of the Savior), and was inspired by the argumentation of the followers of Melchizedek who, drawing from the same *Epistle,* reached the conclusion that the Christ, as far as his essence and rank, was not above but below the celestial angel Melchizedek.[147]

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[144] H. Corbin, "Necessite de l'angelologie," in *L'Ange et l'homme,* Paris, 1978, p. 38.

[145] *Ibid.,* p. 39.

[146] A. Vaillant, *Les Livre des secrets d' Henoch,* Slavic text and French translation, Paris, 1976; M.A. Knibb, *The Ethiopic Book of Enoch,* Oxford, 1976; R.H. Charles, *The Book of Enoch,* London, 1917.

[147] M. Warner, *Die Entstehung des christlichen Dogmas problemgeschictlich dargesteullt,* Berne and Tubingen, 1953, p. 344.

Joshua/Jesus, Unknown Prophet and Syncretic Messiah

The creature whose crucified body and spirit of sacrifice have dominated two thousand years of an inhuman civilization pushed abstinence and abnegation so completely that he left no traces of his passage through history.

Historians, philosophers, authors, polygraphs — no one in the First Century heard the heroes of the evangelical novels speak. Pliny the Elder (instructed in the existence of the Nazarenes, nevertheless), Justin of Tiberiade, Juvenal, Martial, Dion Chrysostome, Philon of Alexandria, Petrone — all knew nothing of this man.

Flavius Joseph, attentive observer of a war of the Jews in which he collaborated with the Romans, cites Theudas, Jacob and Simon, sons of Juda of Gamala. But the least echo of the exemplary gesture of a New Joshua, named Jesus by the Greeks, never reached him; perhaps there was a copyist who, in the Slavic version of the Twelfth Century, interpolated information about Jesus, the absence of which struck him as inadmissible to a contemporary historian. The patriarch of Constantinople, Photios, made a show of honesty, if not naivete, in this regard. Commenting on the *Chronicles of the Kings of the Jews,* credited to Justin of Tiberiade (he had a copy of the manuscript, which no longer exists), Photios — in his *Myriobyblion* (108), a collection of analyses of 279 different texts read by him — is indignant about the silence concerning Jesus, though the author [of the *Chronicles of the Kings of the Jews*] lived several kilometers from Caphernaum, a celebrated city in the sacred geography of the Church.[148]

The Qumran manuscripts know Seth, Melchizedek, and the Master of Justice. They know nothing of Jesus, unless "Jesus" is an identikit [*portrait-robot*] Messiah and a script [*texte*] plagiarized by *The Sermon on the Mount.*

As for the *Letter attributed to Barnabas,* a Judeo-Christian text [written at the] end of the First or the beginning of the Second Century that extolls the abandonment of Mosaic law, not in the spirit, but in the letter (circumcision of the heart must replace circumcision of the sex[ual organ]), Jesus is none other than Joshua, son of Noun. Around 230–250, Origen, in a sermon on Joshua/Jesus, celebrated the intemporal and exemplary glory of the biblical Joshua whom he calls Jesus.

In 135 (and not between 80 and 90), the Pharisian convention condemned the heresy of the *noisrim* or Nazarenes, but knew nothing of a community-head named Jesus.

One must wait until the beginning of the Second Century to find an allusion to the *chrestianoi,* otherwise known as the Messianists (*Chrestos* or *Christos* translates the Hebrew word *Messiah*). Around 111, a letter from Pliny to Trajan asks the emperor about the fate to reserve for the *chrestianoi* — according to all probability, the Elchasites — who "assemble before the dawn to sing hymns to the Messiah as to a God" (*Christo quasi Deo*).

In the same epoch, Tactitus, in his *Annals* and, a little later, Suetone, speak not of a Jesus but of a *Chrestos,* the cause of agitation under Nero. Therefore, there existed at the same time a quite historical *Chrestos,* who preoccupied Emperor Hadrian and aroused the disapproval of Greco-Roman [public] opinion: the nationalist Messiah, Bar Kochba, hero of the last insurrection of the Jewish people.

Tactitus and Suetone were not unaware that the Rome of Claudius and Nero had repressed many agitations of Jewish Messianism then led by the Zealot movement. The Elchasite behavior described by Pliny in his letter to Trajan, who was lenient, did not justify the repulsion felt by Tacitus and

[148] I. Kryvelev, *Le Christ: mythe ou realite?* Moscow, 1987.

Suetone: their injurious commentaries inspired even more insults addressed to the Jewish religion as well as the contemporary rise of anti-Semitism.

Around 160, the Christ or Messiah of a Christian such as Justin the Apologist was not a historical individual. He was a God incarnated in the form of a man, martyred on earth and returned to the divine essence of which he was the emanation (this is the doctrine of the *angelos-christos* that Catholicism would condemn much later under the name Docetism). The irony is that this conjecture about a prophet born from a man and a woman [originally] emanated from a Jew. Justin reports in his *Dialogue with the Jew Tryphon*:

> Those who affirm that the Christ was a man, and that he was anointed and became the Christ by election, seem to me much closer to the truth than your doctrine. Because we [are] the Jews, we expect the Christ in so far as he is a man born from man and Elie will come to anoint him when he has come. But if the one of whom you speak avers to be the Christ, one must conclude that he is a man born from man. Nevertheless, since Elie did not come to anoint him, I do not believe that he is the Christ.[149]

Martha of Chambrun-Ruspoli, who cites Justin, adds: "It is perhaps so as to respond to this argument that we read in the Gospels that Elie will return in the person of John the Baptist."[150]

And Tryphon still objected: "You Christians follow vain rumors, you have invented a Christ in the way you inconsiderately sacrifice your lives."[151]

How can the historians, who are so little attached to the testimony of attested facts, accredit the Catholic and Roman fable of a historical Jesus, whereas he is still for Justin (a Saint and martyr, according to the Church) an *angelos-christos,* and who possesses neither family nor history in the letters of this Saul/Paul whom Marcion mentions for the first time.

In a challenge to the forgeries of Eusebius of Cesaree and "the Father of the Church," the Emperor Julian, writing his *Against the Galileans* around 350 (it was later destroyed, except for several quotations, as a precaution), finds himself grounded in affirming: "If you can show me that one of these men is mentioned by the noted writers of the epoch — these events [supposedly] taking place under Tiberias and Claudios — then you would be right to consider me to be a perfect liar."[152] Obviously, Julian did not belong to the long line of liars.

On the other hand, in the Fourth Century, Jerome — a saint according to the Church — exposed the truth by propagating the letters that Seneca exchanged with Paul, proving (as with the adventures imagined by the *Acts of the Apostles*) that the author of the epistles disposed of an historical and dogmatic existence well before Marcion's discovery. (The question of the Gosepls that, canonical or apocryphal, are only, following Soden, *kultlegende* ["cult legends"] will be examined further on.)[153]

Everything happens today as if the historians, finally perceiving the enormity of the official lie, now devote themselves to evoking plausible historical Jesuses, despite the first two centuries, in which he played [the role of] angel-Messiah: a glimmer imprisoned in a body frees itself from death and returns to God. Not ignoring the character of the "pious fables" (according to Loisy, Bultmann, Guillermin and Schweitzer), or the anecdotes that exoterically translated the elements of the myth, the historians draw

[149] Justin, *Dialogue avec le juif Tryphon,* p. 49.
[150] M. de Chamrun-Ruspoli, *Le Retour du Phenix,* p. 69.
[151] Justin, *op. cit.,* p. 48.
[152] P. de Labriole, *La Reaction paienne. Etude sur la polemique antichretienne du 1 au IV siecle,* Paris, 1934, p. 19.
[153] H. von Soden, *Christentum und Kultur in der geschictliche Entwicklung ihrer Beziehungen,* 1933.

from New Testament, the texts of which were revised as late as the Fourth Century, information that is coupled with events from the very first decade. Brandon thus advances the idea of Jesus as a Zealot, crucified between two *lestoi* or brigands, from the term with which Joseph [Flavius] qualifies the anti-Roman guerrillas.[154] So as to win the good graces of Rome, the Pauline school made a pacifist into a martyr, crucified not by the Romans but by the Jews. As for Robert Amberlain, who bases himself on the crucifications of Jacob and Simon (the sons of Juda of Gamala), he infers that Jesus was their father, also a Zealot.[155]

Elements of a Forgery

The 70-odd canonical and apocryphal scriptures elaborated for the greatest glory of the Messiah Jesus illustrates in an exemplary manner a remark by Robert Graves: "The tales (are) especially explications of rituals or religious theories presented under the form of histories: a veritable compendium of instructions in the manner of the Hebraic books and possessing many points in common with them."[156]

Such a large number of elements entered into the fabrication of a historical Jesus that accounting for them all would require several volumes and a quantity of energy that, for my part, I would prefer to invest in more passionate matters. Thus I will content myself with recalling the most obvious.

The only Jesus known in the First Century was the biblical Joshua, son of Noun, and Jesus ben Shira, whose name appears in a book of Wisdom.

The myth of Joshua carried a double eschatology: a natural salvation recalled by the River Jordan, beyond which the successor of Moses led his people, and a universal salvation because the crossing of the celestial river, or the baptismal immersion in the waves, was accomplished without striking any blows against the kingdom of the Father. The syncretism born from the Zealot opposition to the Roman occupiers did not fail to found the preoccupations of the Zealots, Essenes, and Nazarenes in a universal eschatology. The reincarnation of the *Tsedeq,* the Just, martryed around 63 [B.C.E.], was revived by the crucification of Jacob and Simon of Gamala, brothers or witnesses of God, according to a *midrashic* expression reprised by the *Apocalypse attributed to John.*

In *Revolution in Judea* [English in original], Maccoby supposes that Barrabas and Jesus were actually one person: the first, put to death as a "bandit," politically symbolized the second. For myself, I am inclined to approach the meanings of the two names: Bar Abbas, Son of the Father, and Joshua/Jesus, "God saved, saves, will save." This is very much like the trinity of Naassene sects that clearly evoked Kalakau or Adam, the man from on high; Saulassau, the man from below; and Zeesai, the Jordan that flows towards the high and that Adam deposed [*dechu*] through terrestrial suffering overcome so as to return to the Father.

It is still Joshua, the Jordan and the soul imprisoned in matter that is described by a Naassene hymn transcribed in the *Elenchos*:

> Jesus said, regard the Father
> Pursued by evil on the earth
> Far from your breath, she [the Earth] truly wanders

[154]Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots,* Manchester, 1967.
[155]R. Ambelain, *Jesus ou le mortel secret des templiers,* Paris, 1976.
[156]R. Graves, *La Deesse blanche, op. cit.,* p. 66.

It looks to flee from bitter chaos
and it does not know how to cross it.

In the manner of Cyprian, the Bishop of Carthage who died in 258, the Catholics called *Ecclesiasticus liber* or *Ecclesiastic* the *Sophia Iesou uiou Sirach* (the *Wisdom of Jesus, Son of Sirach*), the last *sapiential* book to figure in the Bible of the Seventy. Written on the eve of the Maccabees' uprising, the work enjoyed a great reputation among the Zealots.

"Whoever seizes the Law receives Wisdom." And this "comes before him like a mother, like a virgin wife, she welcomes it; she nourishes it with the bread of prudence, she gives it the water of wisdom to drink." As in all the Gnostic and Christian developments, this *Sophia,* mother, wife and virgin (all at the same time) rules at the side of God and communicates her knowledge (her gnosis) to the Sons of Israel so that they can be saved. But her remarks encompass more than just the Hebrew people. She meant to found an alliance in which God encountered Israel so as to promote the order that will permit all of humanity to accede to salvation.

Thus the Essene sects referred to a New Alliance (*Novum Testamentum,* in Latin), the universal message of which the Master of Justice would express through his return.

In his study of Lilith, Jacques Brill says, with pertinence, with respect to the *Sophia Iesou uiou Sirach*: "The author of it is represented as a child whose marvelous deeds and gestures illustrate wisdom, in the manner in which the deeds and gestures of Jesus are treated in the *Gospels of Childhood.*"[157]

The virgin wife and mother, the child nourished by divine wisdom — do not they offer to prophetic imaginations and commentators on community rules enough elements for an anecdotal staging that could facilitate access to simple souls? The clumsy and confused didactic of the Hebrew and Aramaic *midrashim* easily found among Greek authors a novelistic form that pleased the people. The *Homelies of Peter,* the *Pastor* of Hermas, the *Acts,* the apocryphal and canonical gospels were [all] literary fictions with apologetic pretensions.

Before the staging and imagery illustrated [certain] allegories and symbols, there might have existed other *sapientaux* compilations continuing [the saga of] Jesus ben Sirach. This is the case with a work discovered at Nag-Hammadi: *The Hidden Words that Jesus the Living Said and Were Transcribed by Didyme Jude Thomas,* which the Catholics would call the *Gospel of Thomas.*[158]

The idea of a Jesus who restored a *Sapientale* tradition opportunely doubled as the angel-messiah with a human nature. Here is expressed the figure of [Jesus as] an insurgent, an audacious thinker, a philosopher proferring the truths of biblical morality, of which Jewish orthodoxy (cramped by its sacerdotal rituals) made so little. The *Sophia* that is dispensed under his name serves as a guide for the leaders of the Nazarene and Ebionite communities; it also brings to them the authority of the master who reflects on his disciples, witnesses, and brothers in spirit.

Other compilations of *Sapienatux* remarks made by Jesus ben Sirach were propagated ever since Basilides, in the Second Century, affirmed receiving from Matthew the secret doctrines of the Savior — the name Jesus being confused with the saving role of the *Sophia*-Spirit. There would exist under the name Matthew, *alias* Levy, an apocryhphal gospel and a gospel revised according to the Catholic canon.

The hypothetical conjunction of a sage born from the book of Jesus ben Sirach and the *angelos-christos* named Jesus is confirmed when one finds out that, around 100–110, the Christian Gnostic Satornil of Antiochus, who was the first to found his doctrine on the name of Jesus, established a

[157] J. Brill, *Lilith,* Paris, 1986.
[158] J. Doresse, *L'Evangelie selon Thomas,* Monaco, 1988.

distinction between a just and wise man named *Iesou,* on the one hand, and, on the other other, the Messiah or Christos, the intelligence of the transcendent God who united with him at the adult age.

* * *

To the warrior Joshua, who prophesized the reconquest of Palestine, was added Joshua the Sage, who summoned men to the incarnation of the Sophia-Spirit that would conduct them to salvation. And to the amalgam was added the Adamic Joshua, the double of Melchizedek/Michael.

"The entire trajectory of Joshua/Jesus," Dubourg writes, "rests in the Christianity of the beginnings of resurrection and salvation."[159]

The *Gospel of the Ebionites* speaks of the final union of the Holy Spirit (the Sophia) with Jesus, the last of the prophets. And, according to the *Gospel of the Hebrews*: "The Holy Spirit says that it was lodged in all of the prophets, [finally] taking its repose in Jesus." Ebionites, Cerinthians, and Nazarenes actually imposed a syncretic and prestigious name of such a nature to put an end to the quarrels over Messiahs in which, around the end of the First Century, were mixed NHS the Serpent, Barbelo the Essential Woman, Sophia, Seth, Melchizedek, and the Master of Justice (sometimes symbolized by another sign of Messianic rallying, the sixth letter of the Hebrew alphabet WAW.)[160] Hermetic thought and magical practices were manifested in a number of sects in which abounded talismans and abraxas [stones] engraved with signs of power (IAW, WAW, WW, the sign W transcribing the omega and the litany of the seven vowels). Jung wanted to identify Jesus and *lapis,* "stone," in latter-day alchemical texts.

After the collapse of Palestine in 70, the warrior Joshua ceded place to his divine transcendence, to his spiritual *alter ego.* Having lost the war, he propagated in hearts a message of hope that was less contingent, more generously universal and prudently intemporal: "God saved, saves, will save." The meaning of the Name left no doubt.

"Jesus, whose name is also the Savior," Ptolemy writes, "or still, according to his Father, Christ and Logos; or still the All, because he preceded all."[161]

Even the canonical Gospel placed under the name of Matthew did not dream of dissimulating it: "You will give to him the name of Jesus because he will save" (*Gospel attributed to Matthew,* 1, 21).

Up to the end of the Second Century, nay, beyond, this Joshua/Jesus was nothing other than the Spirit-Sophia of God incarnated in the suffering of terrestrial existence, overwhelmed by death, resuscitated, and returned to the place of his divine origin.

For Justin the Apologist, the Christ identified himself with the Sophia or the Logos described by Philo of Alexandria: "God engendered from himself a form of power and rational beginning, above all, his works, which was also called the Holy Spirit by him, the glory of the Savior, or at other times Son or sometimes Wisdom or Angel of God or Savior or Logos. He himself sometimes calls himself 'commander in chief,' when he appears under the human form of Joshua, the Son of Noun."[162]

Even the canonical [*Gospel attributed to*] Matthew, despite being purged more than once of its Judeo-Christian and Gnostic residues, conserved the idea of a Son of Man who co-created the world with God: "The Son of Man will arrive in his glory, accompanied by all the angels, and he will sit with majesty upon his throne with all the nations united before him" (*Gospel attributed to Matthew,* 25,

[159]B. Dubourg, *L'Invention du Jesus, op. cit.,* II, p. 264.
[160]A. Dupont-Sommer, *La Doctrine secrete de la lettre WAW d'apres une lamelle arameene inedite,* Paris, 1961.
[161]Leisegang, *La Gnose, op. cit.,* p. 212.
[162]Fossum, *op. cit.,* p. 357.

31–32). We still cite the Jewish liturgical fragments of the *Constitution of the Apostles,* in which the Savior is Son, Sophia, Logos, Great Priest and Angel of the Great Council, all at once.

"It is a *christos-aneglos* anthology that requires reproduction here," Henri Corbin says.[163]

> In general, the question is so rarely posed by the spirit of our contemporaries, for whom it is necessary to choose a few references concerning the broad traits. There is the Christology of the Judeo-Christians and the Ebionites, for whom the *Christos* that descended upon Jesus at the moment of baptism in the Jordan was one of the Archangels, who had power over the [other] angels and Creation in general, and who was the savior of the future *Aion,* as Satan was the savior of the current *Aion.* There were the Elkesaites (issued from the preceding), for whom the *Christos* appeared as an angel of immense stature and masculine sex, raising the Book to the founder of the sect, and who was accompanied by a feminine angel, his sister, who was the holy Angel-Spirit (*ruah* is feminine in Semitic [languages]). Among the Valentinians, the *Christos* was an angel from the plerome. In the Gnostic book of the *Pistis Sophia* and the "Books of Joy," there was a *Christos-Gabriel.* And there was still the *Pastor of Hermas,* which belonged to Judeo-Christian literature, and in which the figure of the Archangel or, better said, the figure of the *Christos-Michael* was the dominant figure. In a very old treatise entitled *Of the Triple Fruit of the Christian Life,* the *Christos* was one of the seven archangels created from the fire of the seven evangelical princes (*ex igne principum septem*). In the *Book of the Ascension of Isaiah,* there was the *Angelos-Christos* and the holy Angel Spirit.

* * *

A multiform Joshua, a son of the Virgin Sophia, a Logos, an *angelos-christos,* an author of *sapientaux* remarks, an Adam, co-creator of the world — the Messiah is all this, except the son of Joseph and Mary, born in Bethlehem, preaching the Good News, healing the paralytics, helping the old and the orphans, succumbing to the wickedness of the Jews for preferring humankind to Israel.

Nevertheless, the Catholic Church would describe as a "heretical perversion" the Christian vision that served as the basis for the instauration of its temporal and spiritual church.

It is true that there existed an ecclesiastical christology that inspired the mysterious Saul/Paul and his school so as to ordain the political project of their churches. A crucified person, victim not of the Jews but the Judeans, quite dead in 63 [B.C.E.]; time is nothing to the story in mythical matters. He was contrasted with the disorder of the wandering prophets and their partisans. Was it not assured (*Hymn* XVIII, 14–15) that God gave him the mission of being "according to His truth He who announces the Good News in the time of His goodness, evangelizing the humble people, according to the abundance of His mercy (and watering them) from the source of holiness and consoling those who are contrite of spirit and afflicted"?

Whereas the Songs of the Savior from *Isaiah* declares:

> The Spirit of the Savior YHWH is in me
> because YHWH anointed me
> It is to announce the Good News to the humble people that he sent me

[163]H. Corbin, *op. cit.,* p. 41.

To bandage those who have contrite hearts.[164]

And, in the same text, there is this prefiguration of the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary:

And the men of my Council being in revolt
and murmuring around
And the mystery that You have concealed in me,
They calumny among the sons of the unhappy.[165]

This Messiah offered to tailor-make the fortunes of the men of power, who were resolved to impose their authority on other communities, nay, to federate the Churches, by nourishing the dream of one day offering Rome a State religion. The true founders of the monarchal churches would be Marcion and the Saul whose letters he exhibited. But Marcion discredited himself through a false maneouvre. Blinded by his anti-Semitism, he rejected the Old Testament as a whole. He went even further: he ruined the very assises of the temporal church by imputing the creation of the world to a bloody and crazy God, to a Demiurge whose work reached such perversity that there was nothing more urgent than renouncing it by rejoicing in the beyond of a Good and Unknowable God.

The bishops of Smyrna, Carthage, Rome, Lyon, Antioche and Alexandria did not think that they could increase their control over the popular and aristocratic mindsets of the world if they professed a perfect disdain for terrestrial and corporeal matter. They would invent a carnal Jesus, his two feet on the earth, certainly assuming divine grace and invested with a salvational role, but carrying himself like any other human creature … a God who shared the common existence of the humble people, with their temptations and weaknesses. The popular Christianity of the New Prophecy greatly contributed to the painting of this portrait of the Savior.

A proletarian due to his father, a slightly simple carpenter, he pled to an uncontestable divine ascendance due to his mother, Mary the Virgin, who was Sophia, Mariaumne, while her divine associate [*paredre*], Prunicos the Prostitute, became Mary Magdala.

Mary herself was not born yesterday. In *The Return of the Phoenix,* Martha de Chambrun-Rospoli notes that, according to the old Egyptian religion, "TUM, in his capacity as Creator, would send across the abyss the soul of his Son, the Word [*Verbe*], whom he engendered by himself from his own substance. And he will pronounce the words: 'Being made flesh' (text from the Mer-en-Ra Pyramid, line 97, Editions Maspero). And the Spirit (Thoth), crossing the abyss to the earth, would stop before the sycamore at which NOUT, the Virgin, stayed. He penetrated the divine germ into her womb."[166]

Alexandria and Upper Egypt offered an old crucible for speculations on the female Spirit, much later virilized by an angel procreating the New Joshua.

Why was Jesus born in Bethlehem? Because the biblical text *Micah* (5, 1) declares:

And you, Bethlehem, Ephrata,
Although you are small among the clans of Juda,
From you will come out, for me,

[164] A. Dupont-Sommer, *Les ecrits esseniens…, op. cit.,* p. 373.
[165] Cited by Laperrousaz, *Les manuscrits de la mer Morte,* Paris, 1961, p. 55.
[166] M. de Chambrun-Ruspoli, *op. cit.,* p. 79.

Those who will dominate Israel.

The grotto and the date 25 December, borrowed from the mythology of Mithra, entered into the politics of the recuperation of the competing cults, whose references were Christianized.

Thus it went from the borrowed symbolism of bread and wine in the Second Century, to the rituals of Attis and the replacement of the Essene eucharistic banquet, in which sharing bread and water simply restored the commensal [activity] that welded together the members of the same community.

The Passion (from *patiri,* "to suffer") drew its inspiration from the torments of the Servant of the Savior reported in the *Book of Isaiah* and, brought up to date in the epoch of the Master of Justice, a suffering and glorious Messiah.

Nazareth, a market town that did not exist before the Fourth Century, anecdotally substituted itself for the term "Nazarene," which designated the sect that invented the syncretic doctrine of the Joshua-Savior. The mention of Nazareth in a text, apocryphal or canonical, clearly indicates that the revision dates from the century of Nicaea, at the earliest.

The Messiah was killed on the Mount of Olives because Zacharias cited it as the place where the great miracle would be accomplished.[167]

The couple or syzygy, Mary and Mary Magdala, reproduced the doubling of the Virgin Sophia and the prostitute Prounikos, who was the former's form dethroned and imprisoned in matter. The miracles popularly attributed to Apollonois of Tyane enriched the imagery of the therapeutic Messiah, whose life achieved its term at thirty-three years, in perfect accord with the number that signified purification among the Jews.

The Third Century began to invent for him a childhood in which his mother, Sophia-Mary, was endowed with a Morganatic husband. The idea of the cross still fell under the heading of a symbol for Justin. In his *Apology* (60, 5), he notes "Plato [...] says of the Son of God that God extended him through the universe in the form of an X [...] He did not see that the sign was a cross."

The instauration of a State religion in Nicaea in 325 endowed, *ad majoram Dei gloriam,* the Truth with a dogma and an army finally determined to impose it on all of humanity. The Church, redressing the vaciliating power of the emperors to its profit, extended itself over the earth in which the *pax romana* buried the local civilizations under the rock-slide of its authority.

Orthodoxy invented for itself a past and, choosing from thinkers such as Paul, Justin, Clement and Irenaeus — whose works would be purged and rewritten — , condemned as heretical perversion the truth of the Christianities that preceded it and from which it extracted the rudiments of its theology. The light of Jesus, his apostles and his faithful thus condemned to the scorn and silence of the historians — Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, and atheist, all of whom fell on their knees before the testimony of the New Testament — the effervescence of three centuries, the pleasing state of which Bernard Dubourg thus speaks:

> And all the Gnostics, who squabbled and gutted each other on occasion were like the primitive Christians, Jewish or Samaritan; like the evangelists and the (pseudo-?) Paul, the inventors/finders of 'Jesus/Joshua,' all of them sculpted from piles of narrative, visionary, allegorical and eschatalogical (but not historical!) monuments; and, with the aid of *midrash[im],* chiseled the so-called monuments upon the unique basis of the same and unique Hebraic Bible. Such that they recognize it and know it (as sacred): because long

[167] MacCoby, *Paul et l'Invention du christianisme,* p. 60.

and harsh would be the battle between Gnostics, orthodox Samaritans, Pharisian Jews, Sadduceans, Essenes, Zealots and primitive Christians (*and* in the heart of each group) with respect to the sacredness, one to one, of the books of the Bible. Brawls with respect to *Ezechiel, Henoch,* the *Canticle of Canticles,* etc — brawls with respect to the beginning of the book of *Genesis.* And such-and-such texts discarded, excommunicated and buried in the *genizoth* (see the manuscripts of the Dead Sea).[168]

[168]B. Dubourg, *op. cit.,* II, p. 46.

Chapter 9: the Messianic sects of Joshua/Jesus: Nazarenes, Ebionites, Elchasaites

At the confluence of Essenism, Samaritanism and the baptist movement of Dunstan/Dosithea, sects formed in which a certain communality of doctrine and practice didn't exclude rivalries and struggles for power. Their conjunction, no doubt precipitated by the Zealot insurrection, ended in the consecration of a syncretic messiah invested with the secret name "God saves," who incarnated the long line of prophets "anointed by Adonai" and persecuted for their untimely revelations.

All distinguished themselves by a rigorous asceticism; scorn for material goods, the body, women, and pleasure; recourse to the purificatory and initiating rite of baptism; the need to found of communities or *Ecclesiai* (Churches); propagation of a doctrine of the two roads, that of Light and that of Darkness, sometimes pushed to the cosmic opposition between a Good God and a God who created a bad world; and the expectation of a Messiah or, more exactly, his return, because (sent by the Good God) he was pitilessly put to death by the sacerdotes of the Temple of Jerusalem or their henchmen. The redemption promised by the Angel-Messiah would spread his grace to all of humanity, compensating the just and punishing the wicked.

Hostile to the Sadduceans and the Pharisians, these sects accommodated themselves to the philosophical speculations of Philo of Alexandria. His Judaic monotheism actually gave to *gnosis* a manner of safe-conduct that the supposed Fathers of the Church didn't fail to use. On the other hand, with a perfect unanimity, they execrated the Great Power of life that the works of Simon of Samaria illustrated.

Nazarenes and Ebionites

Pliny the Elder, recopying reports drafted on the orders of Emperor Augustus by one of his generals, Marcus Agrippa, indicates in Book V of his *Natural Histories* that not far from Apamea, in Syria, Nazarenes lived in a city called Bambyx, Hierapolis or Mabog.

Marcus Agrippa died in 12 [B.C.E.]; Dubourg situates his investigations between 30 and 20 [B.C.E.]. Accounting for the lapse of time required for the installation in Syria of a sect born in Palestine, Dubourg judges plausible the presence of a Nazarene current around 50 B.C.[169]

In the beginning a priest-warrior consecrating to YHWH an existence of austerity and piety, the *nazir* thereafter designated a man devoted to God by a vow of "nazireat." The word suggests a connection with "Nazoreans" or "Nazarenes": "the observers, the conservers."

Rallied to the rigorous faction of Judaism, hostile to the Sadduceans and the Pharisians, they inscribed themselves in the general line of Essenism, of which they perhaps formed a community or Church. The Greek authors of the *Acts of the Apostles,* who compiled and rewrote ancient *midrashim*

[169]B. Dubourg, *L'Invention de Jesus, op. cit.,* II, p. 157.

so as to reconcile the schools of Simon/Paul and Simon Cephas, put on stage a Jewish orthodoxy that vituperated the *hairesis ton nazoraion,* the heresy of the Nazarenes.

The Pharisian rabbis knew them under the appelation *noisrim* and the declared heretics (*aher,* "others"), not in 90 as is often advanced, but in 135, when — from the revolt of the Messiah Bar Kochba, which they refused to join — there was born the legend of a Joshua/Jesus who was a pacifist and respectful of the Romans.

Bar Kochba stigmatized them in his letters under the name "Galileans." In the Second Century, Hegesippe thus referred to one of the Jewish sects of his time, but for Emperor Julian (331–363), cited by Cyrille of Alexandria, "Galilean" was still a synonym for "Christian." Moreover, several texts designated the Messiah Jesus with the word "Galilean."

Like the other anti-Judean Jewish sects, the Nazarenes did not escape the Zealot embrace. Only their refusal to rally themselves to the troops of Bar Kochba around 133–135 exonerated them from the reproach of violence and haloed them with the pacifism thanks to which the Greco-Roman Christian communities demarked themselves from "Semitic fury."

Issued from Jewish religious extremism, Nazarenism paradoxically opened the door to an incessant revision of the Mosaic message and law. Their *midrashim,* which were propagated in the assemblies of believers, prepared the coming of the Messiah that Israel invoked in the heart of the troubles of the war, correcting the prophecies of the past and adapting them to the modernity of the circumstances, forming the streams of the foreseeable torrent that would swell the Good News announced by the Hymns of the Master of Justice.

One would deceive oneself if one were to give Nazarenism a unity that contradicted the echoes of quarrels between the leaders whose names have been preserved: Theudas/Thomas the Egyptian, Jacob, Simon Cephas, John the Essene, Zacchea/Clement, Barnabas, Saul also known as Paul, and Jochanaan also known as John the Baptist.

A sect of the Ebionites, still active in the Fourth Century, certainly derived from these *ebbyonim* ("poor people"), laid the foundations among the Essenes for voluntary poverty, of which the Messalians, Vaudois, Beghards, Fraticelles and Apostolics would discover the perilous virtues.

The Nazarenes, or at least the tendency that Jochanaan represented as the only prophetic authority, perpetuate themselves to this very day in Mandeism, always alive between the Tigress and Euphrates. Their name means "those who save," the "Gnostics." They were also known as "Christians of Saint John" — meaning Jochanaan/John the Baptist. Their late doctrine, clarified by an abundant literature (*Ginza* or *Tresor,* subdivided into a *Right Ginza* and a *Left Ginza*), formed a syncretism in which were mixed Judeo-Christian, Iranian and Babylonian elements.

The Mandeans claimed for themselves Hibil (Abel), Shitil (Seth), Anosh (Henoch) and John the Baptist, and formed one of the branches of Nazarenism, which, questing for a unique Messiah, rejected the accord established by the partisans of Jacob, Simon/Peter and Saul/Paul under the name Joshua/Jesus, because, according to them, Anosh showed that Jesus was a false prophet.

Elchasaites

In the third year of Trajan's reign, around 100–101, Nazarenism seemed to give way to a new generation of Christians: the Elchasaites. (The diversity of the names must not confuse us. The "Sampseans," whom Hegesippe called the "Nasbotheans," only offered variants of the expression *seo ayya,* otherwise known as "the Baptists.") A sacred book was delivered to the prophet Elchasai, chief of a Christian

community — which no doubt justified the inquest of Pliny the Younger, the papal legate of Bythinia — by two angels, one male, the Son of God, the other female, the Holy Spirit. The *Homelies of Peter* counted a number of their writings, at least in their original versions. They also constituted a Christianity different from the opinion that the Catholics of the Fourth Century tried to impose; that is why Epiphanius of Salamis — who was ironic in his *Panarion, or the Box of Drugs* [when he wrote]: "Not being Christians, nor Jews, nor pagans, but something of an intermediary, at base they are nothing" — showed *a contrario* that they were Jews, Christians and pioneers of a Greco-Roman Christianity (but the Church would attribute that role to the enemy of the Elchasaites, Saul/Paul, when it snatched him from the hands of his discoverer, Marcion).

Did not Elchasaitism, with its real or mythical prophet — Elchasai is related to the Aramaic word *Ieksai,* which means "Hidden Savior" — announce the great current of popular Christianity that, under the name New Prophecy, obeyed the Christ reincarnated in the prophet Montan? It isn't easy to forge a precise opinion on the comings-and-goings of the sects, prophets and apostles when confronted with the ordinary fanaticism of received truth: the ancestors of the Mandeans took exception to Joshua/Jesus; the respective partisans of Jacob and Peter, hostile to Jochanaan also known as John the Baptist, somehow or other accorded themselves so as to thrash the imposture of Saul/Paul, whose disciples held Peter to be a traitor and renegade. The faithful to Jude/Thomas triumphed at Edessa, but without attracting a unanimous veneration, because certain people dressed him in the role of Judas. Add to this the fact that Elchasaitism, which was hostile to Marcion and active in Rome with Alcibiade of Apamea, witnessed the birth of Mani, the future founder of a religion and the clear inspiration for the dogmas of Marcion.[170] Mani, raised in an Elchasaite community, reprised the Samaritan titles "Unique Envoy" and "True Prophet." The "Unique Envoy" was an old Judeo-Samaritan name for the principal agent of God ("He who is designated the Envoy of God received the Spirit of God," *Isaiah,* 61, 6). This was also the status of the Master of Justice and Joshua/Jesus. All the inspired prophets — Elchasai as much as Montan — can claim him. One understands that Catholicism accorded exclusivity to Jesus, the only "True Messiah," and that it prohibited all competition under the pain of death.

[170] G.P. Luttikhuisen, *The Revelation of Elchasai: Investigation into the Evidence for Mesopotamian Jewish Apocalypse of the Second Century and It's Reception by Judeo-Christian Propagandists,* Tubingen, 1985.

Chapter 10: Quarrels about Prophets and Apostles: Jochanaan, Theudas/Jude/Thomas, Jacob, Simon-Peter, Barnabas, Saul/Paul

If history hasn't preserved the least trace of someone named Jesus, on the other hand, his inventors and worshippers — disguised [*travestis*] in the course of time as brothers, companions, witnesses, disciples or apostles — easily revealed themselves at random to the witnesses of the First Century. So it goes with John the Baptist, Thomas, Jacob the Just, Simon Cephas and Barnabas.

Paradoxically, concerning Paul, the best known, upon whom the biographers spread themselves with the greatest gullibility, there remains nearly nothing that hasn't been reduced to the authenticity of short notes taken from the letters that sheltered the catch-alls of the Marcionites and anti-Marcionites, before being washed, purged and re-sharpened several times according to the rectified line of the Fourth Century.

Jochanaan, Called John The Baptist

In his *Jewish Antiquities,* drafted around 95, Flavius Joseph speaks of a preacher named John:

> He was a man of fortune who incited the Jews to the practices of virtue, justice for all and piety to God so that they could receive baptism. Actually, God considered baptism to be agreeable if it served not to pardon certain faults, but to purify the body, after the soul was purified by justice. (*) Around John were assembled many people who, having heard of him, had reached the greatest excitation (XVIII, 116–118).

(*) Cf. the Master of Justice, Jacob the Just, Tsadoq, Melchitsedeq.

The Greek version of the *War of the Jews* (written around 90) doesn't mention Jochanaan. Two Slavic versions, written much later and unreliable, return to this person. One reads in the first version:

> By this time there lived among the Jews a man of strange costume; he applied to his body the hides of animals everywhere he wasn't covered by his own fur. In his face, he was similar to a savage.
>
> He went to the Jews and summoned them to freedom, saying: 'God sent me so that I can show you the Road of the Law, by which you can deliver yourselves from many powerful people. And over you will not reign a mortal, but the Very High who sent me.'
>
> And when the people heard, they rejoiced. And he was followed all over Judea, the region in the vicinity of Jerusalem. And he did nothing other than plunge them into the waves of the Jordan and dismissed them by saying to them that they should renounce the[ir]

> bad works and that he would give them a king who would emancipate them and submit to them all who were not submitted to them but who would not be submitted to anyone.
>
> Some blasphemed, others believed him. And as he had been led before Archelaus and as the doctors of the Law had been assembled, they asked him who he was and where he had just been. He responded to them: 'I am a man, the Spirit of God has led me and I feed upon reeds, roots and carob.'
>
> They threw themselves upon him to torture him if he did not renounce his words and acts, but he said: 'It is for you to renounce your abominable works and to become devoted to the Savior of your God.'
>
> And Simon, originally an Essene scribe, arose in anger and said: 'We read divine books every day. But you, who come from the forest like a beast, you dare to instruct us and seduce the crowd with inflammatory discourse.' He hurried to torment him physically. But he punished them by saying: 'I will not reveal to you the mystery that lives in you, since you haven't wanted it. Through this will come on you an inexpressible unhappiness, and it will be your fault.'
>
> After having spoken thus, he went to the other bank of the Jordan and, [the others] no longer daring to molest him, he continued to act as before.

The second Slavic version has Herod intervening.

> Alone, this man whom one has called a savage came before him (Herod) in anger and said to him: 'Why have you taken the woman of your brother, infamous one? Since your brother is dead due to a pitiless death, you too will be bankrupted by the false spirit [*celeste*]. The decree of God will not be lifted, but you will perish miserably in a strange country. Because you do not uphold [*suscites*] the line of your brother but you satisfy your carnal passion, since he already had four children.'
>
> From what Herod heard, he became angry and ordained the beating and hunting of him. But he did not cease accusing Herod everywhere that he found himself, until Herod seized him and ordered him to be slaughtered.
>
> His character was strange and his life wasn't human. He lived like a spirit without flesh. His lips never knew bread. Even at Easter, he didn't eat unleavened bread, saying that this was given as a souvenir of God, who delivered his people from servitude, as a consolation because the road was sad. As far as wine and the intoxicating drinks, he didn't even let them near him. And he had a horror of [eating] any animal. He disapproved of all infractions and for him it was necessary to make usage of carob.

Fanatic of anti-Nature, ascetic moralist, hysterical and religiously extreme imprecator, Jochanaan inscribed himself in a current that hasn't ceased, up to today, to oppose to the freedom of life a system of corporeal and spiritual occlusion that propagates morbidity and death. Such dispositions accorded, depending on the circumstances, with the resentment of the disinherited, nay, all power subjected to Roman colonization that [in response] erected its God as an intemporal machine of war against the imperialist violence of the West.

According to the Slavic manuscripts, his rage at the people of the Temple did not spare the masters of the country. Presented to Archelaus, *ethnarque* of Judea, Samaria and Idumea from 4 [B.C.E.] to

5 [C.E.] and subsequently banished, he would succumb much later (according to the version in the evangelical legends) to the blows of Herod Antipas, *tetrarque* of Galilee from 4 [B.C.E.] to 38 [C.E.].

It [the news] raged along the Jordan that Joshua, a conqueror, a miracle-worker, a maker of miracles (he stopped the sun) and leader of the Jewish people, had crossed, [thereby] surpassing a limit that was inseparably terrestrial and celestial.

As in Essenism, his baptism symbolically liberated the soul from the "stain of the body" and consecrated a penitential choice, the renunciation of the goods of the earth and the mortification of the flesh. The least pleasures horrified this man-saint and he execrated the animals, whose sexual liberty annoyed his aggressive chastity. If he covered himself with animal skins, it was to resemble a certain Esau, of whom *Genesis* (25, 25–26) speaks.

The hostility of the Sadduceans and Pharisians did not rally to him the adhesion of the Essene factions, because a Man of the Community named Simon (so celebrated that [Flavius] Joseph cites him) violently took him aside, manifesting the animosity that reigned between the saints, or perfect ones, devoted to prayer and study, and the preachers of voluntary poverty, or *ebbyonim,* the Ebionites. Here it must have been a question of rival currents of Essenism, because Simon would not have seated himself among his worst enemies, that is, the sacerdotal aristocracy of the Temple.

Therefore, the hostility to John the Baptist remained vivid among the Nazarenes-Elchasaites, from whom emanated the *Homelies of Peter.* For the Elchasaites, John the Baptist incarnated the Messiah's adversary. A syzygy was situated within the antagonism between the Light Jesus and the Dark Jesus, the Son of Man and the road of salvation, and Jochanaan, the Son of Woman, and the road of evil.

In the encounter of the Essenism of the communities — of which agriculture assured the subsistence through various meats and wine, and allowed the neophytes to marry and satiate themselves in the design of procreation, that is, a sexuality reduced to the coitus of circumstance — the wandering prophets extolled absolute dispossession, and continence without reserve; they stigmatized the "laxity" of their co-religionists.

Mandeism (from *manda,* "gnosis"), another sect issued from Essenism, held John the Baptist as its founding apostle, and took exception to the false messiah Jesus, professed an equal scorn for the Jews and the sectarians of the impostor "denounced by Anosh" (Henoch).

In the heart of Nazarenism, contradictory *midrashim* re-traced the complexities of the quarrel of the prophets. The echo of these Hebrew and Aramaic texts (today disappeared) clearly resounds, even in the late canonical Gospels that translated into Greek writings the allegorical and Semitic meanings of which escaped their redactors.

In the *Gospel attributed to Luke,* John the Baptist is not the simple precursor of Jesus, but the announcer of the end of time and the imminent kingdom of God. The works placed under the names of Mark and Matthew present John the Baptist as equal in importance to Jesus, whom he baptized. He recruited his partisans from among the Jochanaanites and only acceded to the first rank of the mythological scene once his master was decapitated. Herod, moreover, saw in Jesus the reincarnation of John the Baptist.

On the other hand, the *Gospel attributed to John* reduced his role to a congruous share. He is neither prophet nor Elie, but only "the voice that cries out in the desert"; not the Light, but a witness to the Light.

From whence comes the question: did not the John proposed as the author of a Gospel that, at the beginning, was Gnostic (Naassene or Sethian) — did not he procede from John the Essene whom Flavius Joseph mentions? As far as the *Revelations,* which was a Jewish text transcribed into Greek and also attributed to a certain John: it cites neither Jesus nor Jochanaan, but evokes two "witnesses of

God" in struggle against the Beast, that is to say, Rome. Put to death, they remained three days without burial, then resuscitated and rose to the heavens. Therefore, there existed, according to Joseph, two Jewish and anti-Judean chiefs who were victims of the Roman occupation: Jacob and Simon, sons of Juda of Gamala, mythical witnesses of the Angel-Messiah summoned to lead the Just to final victory, despite the terrestrial failure of 70, and to conquer the world in the name of a God more powerful than the bloody and boastful God YHWH.

Theudas/Jude/Thomas

In 45, in his *Jewish Antiquities* (XX, 97–98) Flavius Joseph cited the tumult incited by the "magician" Thomas, a qualifier frequently synonymous with "Egyptian" due to the great vogue for Hermeticism in Upper Egypt. (*)

> Fadus being governor of Judea, a magician by the name of Thuedas persuaded a great crowd to take their riches with them and follow him to the Jordan. He said that he was a prophet and that, after he had divided it by command, the river would permit them to pass easily. By speaking thus he deceived much of the world. But Fadus didn't let him enjoy this folly. He sent against him a troop of cavalry, which attacked them spontaneously and killed a great many, and took many of the survivors and captured Theudas himself and, after decapitating him, sent the head to Jerusalem.

(*) On the other hand, there is no trace — other than a composite novel entitled *Acts of the Apostles* — of an agitator by the name of Etienne, who speculated on the *Torah,* invented *midrashim,* rose up against the people of the Temple, and claimed to be a Just man, cruelly persecuted, who would return to the earth [after death]. This "imaginary Etienne"[171] fits a portrait that could have included the majority of the Essene preachers, all of whom modeled themselves on the Master of Justice in the midst of a "messianic agitation (that) soon began and didn't end until Bar Kochba."[172]

The *Talmud* identifies the Theudas mentioned by Joseph with Ben Stada, who promised his partisans he'd destroy the walls of Jerusalem as Joshua had destroyed those of Jericho.[173]

Theudas also enjoyed the posthumous privilege of having furnished at least two recruits to the evangelical legends of the apostles. Because Theudas or Thaddeus corresponds to Juda or Judas, who is none other than Thomas. There's no Mystery as to why the acts and gospels call him the "twin bother of Jesus," since Thaddeus, Jude and Thomas [all] mean "twin," from which comes the double of the Greek translators, who were unaware of the original meaning of the name and surnamed Thomas "didyme" (*didumos,* "twin").

While the Nazarene disciples of Jacob and Simon-Peter implanted themselves in Antioch, those loyal to Theudas/Thomas propagated themselves in Edessa, where their communities founded a specific [kind of] Christianity before entering the syncretic wave of the years 90–100. At the beginning, each sect expressed the truth of its quest for a unique messiah by putting themselves under the patronage of an elder, a witness or a "brother" of the Savior. The unification of the Judeo-Christian current would engender the legend of the apostles initially united around the Savior, Adonai, descended to the earth (later there would be divergences, doubts and betrayals).

[171] R. Eisenmann, *Maccabees, Zadokites, Christians and Qumrans,* Leiden, 1983.
[172] *Ibid.*
[173] J. Moreau, *Les persecutions dans l'Empire romain,* Bruxelles, 1964.

By guaranteeing the separation of the waters of the River Jordan to the crowd of his partisans, Theudas/Jude/Thomas identified himself with Joshua. His crossing transmuted the waters of death into the waters of life. Whatever they had been at the time, in the mythic and messianic spirit of the epoch, Joshua and Thomas are mentioned in the *Acts of Thomas* (the manuscript dates from the Sixth Century and no doubt transcribes a much older text): "Jesus then appeared under the form of Thomas and sat on the bed."

Thomas/Thuedas probably had something to do with the *Gospel of the Egyptians,* in which the will to asceticism common to all of Esseno-Baptism expressed itself violently: "Jesus came to abolish the works of women, generation, and by this [he came to] abolish the death that carries away all placed in the world." (Beyond the Christian milieu, the idea also existed in several Hermetic groups of Alexandria. According to the *Poimandres,* 18, love is the cause of death. *Asclepius* supported the contrary thesis.)

The same spirit was encountered in a text discovered at Nah-Hammadi and popularized under the arbitrary name *Gospel according to Thomas.*[174]

This work has points in common with the *Gospel of the Egyptians,* the *Acts of Peter,* the *Acts of Philippe,* the canonical gospels, Naassene, Sethian and Henochian doctrines (*logion* 11), Essenism (*monachos* does not mean monk but the "perfect man," as in the texts from Qumran), Marcion (*logion* 32), Theodotus and Heracleon (*logion* 144), and the *Recognitiones,* a Latin and later version of the *Homelies of Peter,* I, 84 (*logion* 39).[175]

The text includes 118 *logia,* or remarks attributed to Joshua/Jesus, put onstage in the form of brief dialogues between Jacob, Thomas and Simon-Peter. Imprinted by a number of Semitisms, the text seems to be a collection of rewritten, translated and arranged *midrashim.* It manifestly inspired the authors of the canonical gospels, who purged it of doctrinal archaisms and strengthened its ascetic rigor.

In a reversal of the real that is the very inhuman essence of religion, the condemnation of desire and pleasure ended in the identification of the Holy Spirit with a mother who gives life, whereas women bring into the world children who engender death. (This is the sense, that is to say, the meaning of the mistake by which Jesus is called "the Living" in the work attributed to Thomas.) The Adamism of a return to Paradise implies a total de-fleshing [*decharnement*] of sexuality. In Paradise, man is neither male nor female, but identical to the putatively asexual child. Scarcely can it eat of the forbidden fruit of voluptuousness, and so its primitive unity disappears, producing a man who is different from the woman. Only a spiritual androgyny — as pure spirit of a body without desire or impulses — will render to it the disincarnated unicity from which it procedes. The same speculation is illustrated in the *Gospel of the Egyptians.* Catholicism would condemn as heretical the frenzied asceticism devoted to Jude/Thomas as late as the Third Century (this is perhaps the reason that the evangelical novels recognized by the Church execrated the double of the Good Thomas: the informer Judas).[176]

Jacob

In his *Ecclesiastical History* (II, I, 3–4), Eusebius of Cesarea cites an extract from the *Hypotyposes* of Titus Flavius Clemens, known as Clement of Alexandria, who was born around 150 and died around

[174] J. Menard, "L'Evangile selon Thomas," *Nag-Hammadi Studies,* Leiden, V, 1975.
[175] *Ibid.*; Grant, [*trans.*: text missing from original here].
[176] J. Doresse, *L'Evangile selon Thomas, op. cit.*

210. Clement was a Christian philosopher classified among the orthodox by the Catholics, but whom the patriarch and theologian Photios (820–855) judged to be impious and heretical in many of his opinions.

A commentator on biblical texts, Clement belonged to anti-Marcionite Christian Gnosticism, like the Christians of the New Prochecy and its disciple, Origen. He drew his referneces from the *Epistle of Jude,* the *Epistle of Barnabas,* and the *Apocalypse of Peter,* which much later were condemned as apocryphal, because Clement didn't know the canons that still didn't exist when he was alive; of course, his future copyists were careful to mitigate his legitimate misrecognitions by adding antedated citations.

For him, gnosis allowed one to discover the typography of the celestial dwellings, inhabited by the cohorts of hierarchically arranged angels. It revealed to him the superimposed or successive worlds through which the soul elevates itself so as to attain the supreme repose. And Joshua/Jesus was none other than an informed guide [*guide averti*] in a spiritual adventure.

According to the extract produced by Eusebius, Clement declares: "The Savior, after his resurrection, brings gnosis to Jacob the Just, to John and to Peter; they will [then] give it to the 70, of whom Barnabas was one." (This suffices for Eusebius to consecrate Jacob the "bishop of the Church of Jerusalem.")

In another work, the *Stromates,* in which he attempts to reconcile Greek philosophy and Jewish prophetism, he called the true gnosis Christian, in a move different from that of Irenaeus who, vituperating the Christian Gnostics Marcion and Valentin, judged gnosis and the teachings of Jesus to be irreconciliable. Clement refers to the "true tradition rightfully issued from the apostle-saints Peter, Jacob, John and Paul, transmitted from father to son," composing a list of ancient masters in which were unified, under the cover of a will to unity, two antagonistic currents: that of Saul/Paul and that of Jacob and Peter.

Jacob, in whom the Master of Justice was [re]incarnated, played a role of the highest rank in the works at Nag-Hammadi: *Here are the hidden words that Jesus the Living said and were transmitted by Didyme Jude Thomas:* "The disciples said to Jesus: 'We know that you will leave us; who above us will (then) be the (most) grand?' Jesus said to them: 'There where you will be, render yourselves to Jacob the Just, because of whom the heavens and the earth were produced'" (*logion* 13).[177]

[The phrase] "because of whom the heavens and earth were produced" designates Jacob as nothing less than the co-creator of the universe, at the same level as Adam and Jesus, who is furthermore his "brother." This remark, borrowed from a *midrash* that claimed the authority of Jacob, illustrates quite well how the acts of legitimation of the Church — which, depending on the circumstances, erected the master as the auxilliary or right arm of God — were collected, collated, and harmonized to the extent that the (initially disunited) Nazarene Churches federated and formed accords among themselves. Thus, there would appear — engendered by a community inspired by a Levy/Matthew — a work entitled *The Secret Words (*) that the Savior said to Judas Thomas and that I, Matthew, wrote down while I heard them speak, one to another,* sometimes called *Gospel according to Matthew.*[178] The pious lies by virtue of which the local churches invented witnesses or brothers of the Messiah (**) would pass for an inadmissable naivete in the eyes of the redactors of the New Testament, who would take the precaution of borrowing the falsification or, more exactly, the myth of the colors of historical probability, effacing the original documents, which were assessed with [possessing] vulgar aberrations.

[177] *Ibid.,* p. 88.
[178] *Ibid.,* pp. 31–35.

(*) Saul/Paul also speaks of a vision in the course of which he heard "the ineffable words that no one is permitted to repeat."

(**) The abbeys of the Middle Ages didn't proceed in any other fashion when they invented a patron saint and exhibited relics so as to attract the faithful, crowds and alms.

All things considered, the figure of Jacob didn't connect exclusively to Judeo-Christianity, since the Naassenes — according to the *Elenchos* (V, 7) — kept in their teachings "the principle points of the doctrine that Jacob, brother of the Savior, transmitted to Mariamne." Here the Savior was NHS, the Redeemer Serpent, and Mariamne corresponds to Myriam/Mary. It is also under the name Jacob that, after the Second Century, the *Proto-Gospel of Jacob,* a recitation of the childhood of the Christ Jesus and the story of Mary and Joseph (the carpenter) would be propagated.

The original specificity of the Christianity and Church of Jacob was perpetuated in Nestorianism, which was condemned as a heresy and [yet] exists to this day in the Jacobite Churches.

Jacob, prophet and Messiah, would assume the roles of witness, brother, and apostle of Joshua/Jesus to the extent that the diverse currents of Esseno-Christianity, nay, Sethian, Naassene and Barvelite messianisms, little by little resembled and regrouped their patrons or founders within the apostolic cohort of the Savior.

A fragment from the Judeo-Christian Hegesippe (end of the Second Century), transcribed by Eusebius of Cesarea, describes Jacob the Just as an ascetic "sanctified in the womb of his mother," a trait applied to Jesus and that accounts for the mythical slide of Jacob (the Messiah of an Essene community) into Jesus (the syncretic Messiah of the first Churches, perhaps federated by Elchasai).

Like Dunstan, Jochanaan, the Servant celebrated by *Esaie* and other spawn of the Master of Justice, Jacob did not eat meat, and never shaved, did his hair, nor washed. He dedicated all of his time to prayer. Hegesippe called him "rampart of the people," because "those who have faith resemble Jacob."

Among the Elchasaites, Jacob passed for the true founder of their community. The primitive text of the *Homelies of Peter* presents itself as a letter from Clement, *alias* Zachea, to Jacob.

History has preserved traces of [various] Jacobs tied to Messianic agitation and whom the ahistorical spirit of the *midrashim* easily united in an identification rendered plausible by the common fronts of Zealotism and Essenism. According to Flavius Joseph (*Judaic Antiquities* XX, V, 2), Jacob of Gamala, son of Juda and brother of Simon, was crucified around 45, under Alexandrer-Tiberias, who succeded Caspius Fadus (responsible for the execution several months earlier of Theudas/Thomas) as procurator of Judea.

The first Jacob, a Zealot, was doubled by another, either Nazarene or Ebionite. The *Talmud* and a *midrash* set themselves against a Christian Jew named Jacob of Kepher Schanya (or Maia Simai), who was accused of contesting the orthodox rituals prescribed by *Deuteronomy.* Interrogating Rabbi Eliezer on a point of doctrine, he was invited to answer and advance an interpretation drawn from *Micah* (2, 7), which emphasized the solicitude of God in the interests of men. Eliezer rallied to Jacob's explication and thus drew upon himself the reproach of complacency with respect to Nazarenism.

Simon-Peter

Named governor of Bythinia in 111, Pliny the Younger solicited directives from Emperor Trajan on the conduct to adopt with respect to the *chrestianoi,* whose behaviors had aroused unfavorable reactions among the inhabitants (*Letters* X, 96–97). Oscar Cullmann has shown that the incriminated Christian sect was that of the Elchasaites, whose doctrine synthesized the teachings of Nazarenism

and Ebionism, if not other Messianistic sects.[179] Their ideas were expressed in an ensemble of texts that were revised many times and for a long time were held as orthodox by virtue of Clement's name, under whom they had been organized. Indeed, Clement (the "Soft") — a translation of Zachea from the Bible — passed as the third Pope of Rome in the official histories of Catholicism. Rejected much later by the Church, these writings would be re-baptized *Pseudo-Clementines* by the historians who were, all things considered, not eager to deny the aberrant conjecture concerning the epoch in which this Roman pontificate lived.

Under the name of Clement, a fictive person invented by Ireneaus and consecrated by Eusebius,[180] the Pope of Rome and successor to Peter, a text that distinguished three states was thus propagated. The *Homelies [of Peter]* or the *Epistle of Clement to Jacob* proposed the Greek revision of an old *midrash* placed under the name of Zachea. A Greek development, called the *Anagnossos,* was translated and revised under the title *Recognitiones* ("Recognitions") by Rufin, a notorious forger and censor of the works of Origen. Finally, the *Epithome* represents the Catholic version (amputated from the text of the *Homelies*), which would reappear much later under the title *Summary of the Predictions of Peter by Clement.*

The Hebraic source has disappeared, but the primitive kernel, extracted by Cullmann, explicitly reveals the central theme of the speculations advanced by the author: "From the true prophet and the intelligence of the law according to the teachings of the Mosaic tradition." Cullmann summarizes it thus:

> The world with its sins and errors is compared to a house that is filled with smoke. The men who find themselves inside search in vain for the truth, which doesn't know how to enter. Only the true prophet, by opening the door, can give it to them. The prophet is the Christ, entered for the first time into the world in the person of Adam, anointed by the sap of the tree of life. For all beings God made a prototype: for the angels, an angel; for the spirits a spirit; for men a *man* who is Adam-Jesus. Adam is without sin, despite certain mendacious passages in the Scriptures. Adam, the true prophet, announced the world to come. By contrast, Eve, who was inferior to him as the moon is inferior to the sun, was custodian of the present world as the prototype of the prophets born from women, whereas Adam was the 'Son of Man.' The feminine principle leads the men of the first generation astray from the road of truth. Their depravity manifests itself especially in the practice of *sacrifices.* But since the beginning of the world, the true prophet hasn't ceased to travel through the centuries, changing name and form. He was incarnated in Henoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses. Moses renewed the eternal law that Adam had already promulgated, but, at the same time, by authorizing sacrifices, Moses made — to the hardening of the Jews — a concession that placed a curb on the most serious excesses: sacrifices must be offered to God only, and in a unique place. But this permission was only provisional. The true prophet finally reaches his apparent repose in the Christ. He puts an end to sacrifices and replaces them with *baptism.* Also, during the Jewish War, only the baptists were saved. Before dying, the true prophet chose twelve apostles, and, in the manner of Moses, charged 72 doctors of the law with transmitting the truth. By abolishing sacrifices, the Christ doesn't abolish the law, but that which was not part of

[179] B. Dubourg, *L'Invention de Jesus, op. cit.,* II, p. 354.
[180] O. Cullmann, *op. cit.,* pp. 82 and 83.

> the primitive law. He announces that, until the heavens and the earth have passed, not an iota or a trait of the Law will fall.[181]

The author (or authors) of the *Homelies* inscribed themselves in the reformist current that was more or less critical of the biblical texts and Mosaic law. They not only eliminated the prophets who represented feminine principles, but also certain important parts of the *Pentateuch.* Of course, the Elchasaites, in conformity with the Essenian matrix, rejected the sacrifices of the Temple. "When the Law was put in writing, it was subjected to a certain number of additions that contained errors against the unique God" (*Homelies,* II, 38). This agrument recalls those of the Dunstanites or Dositheans. Jacob, their prophet, mytically presided with the authority of a church to which Peter himself was obliged to render an account.

As far as the defense of the unique God, it inscribed itself in the polemic of the two Gods and their respective natures. Was it necessary in 140, in the manner of Marcion, and perhaps in that of Saul, enemy of the Elchasaites, to postulate the existence of a Good and Christian God radically different from YHWH, the creator-god of a bad world, a bloody God who betrayed his people, a Demiurge who was master of a deplorable universe? Or rallying to the Elchasaite thesis, from which would in fact be born the God of Ireneaus, Tertullien and then the Catholics and the Protestants: "God kills with his left hand, that is to say, through the ministry of the Bad that, by temperment, takes pleasure in tormenting the impious. But he saves and makes good with his right hand, that is to say, through the ministry of the Good, which was created for rejoicing in the heaping up of good works by the just and saving them" (*Homelies,* XX, 3)?

Finally, the Elchasaites, having entered into the general quarrel about the "true messiah," were perhaps the first to produce — with Saul/Paul and Satornil — the ecumenical name Joshua/Jesus.

In the manner of the various Christianities of the first two centuries, the Elchasaites' conception of the Messiah was that of the *angelos-christos.* He had been created like one of the archangels — in the same way that Michael is also Melchitsedeq. "To all beings, God gave a prototype: to angels an angel, to the spirits a spirit, to men a man who was Adam-Jesus. Adam was without sin, despite certain mendacious passages in the Scriptures."[182]

Elchasaite Christianity believed in the successive reincarnations of the Messiah, who had "since the origin of the world changed his form and name, and thus reappears ceaselessly and ceaselessly in the world" (*Homelies,* III, 10).

No doubt he is manifested by the voice of Elchasai as he prophesized a half-century later through the mouth of Montanus in the popular Christianity of the New Prophecy, born in Phyrgia, in the immediate neighborhood of the Bythinia of Pliny and the Elchasaites.

But the means of preventing other enlightened ones from obeying the revelation of the Messiah? The two great enemies of Elchasaitism — much like those of Montanism and Tertullien — also [with]held the message of the Christ.

Cullmann did not detect in the primitive text of the *Homleies* a charge made against Marcion, which was refuted instead by a subsequent copyist who revised the text. On the other hand, as Baur has demonstrated, the hostility manifested with respect to Simon the "Magician" in fact aimed at Saul/Paul, held to be a false prophet.

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[181] *Ibid.,* p. 83.

[182] Cited by Maccoby, *Paul et l'invention du christianisme, op. cit.,* p. 260.

Nevertheless, the authors of the *Homelies* did not know any of the letters by Paul, nor the text of the New Testament invested by Marcion. They simply preached the good news, a gospel, taking exception to that of Saul, the founder of competing churches.

According to the *Homelies* (II, 17), "[first there is] the gospel of the lie, preached by the seducer, then comes the gospel of truth, after the destruction of the holy place."

Which holy place? Jerusalem and the Temple? But Essenism never ceased demanding the annihilation of the city consecrated to the "impious priest." Isn't it rather a matter of Qumran, or Damascus, that is to say, DMS, the sanctuary, towards which Paul traveled, according to this legend, when he had [received] the revelation of the Messiah? (Unless the allusion is to after 135.)

If Saul/Paul is treated as a false witness to the Savior, his notes stigmatize his adversaries as "false brothers." Between the different communities invested with the divine message, harmony decidedly did not reign.

Towards the end of the Second Century and more surely in the Fourth Century, the monarchal churches — aiming to reconcile themselves with the good graces of imperial power — would efface from their histories the divergences between the partisans of Jacob and Peter and the disciples of Saul/Paul. Simon-Peter and Paul, finally reconciled, would sit as patron-saints of Rome, in which they had never set their feet.

Nevertheless, the hatred for the "impostor" would never completely disappear from the disparagement of the Christian edifice by Catholicism. A manuscript discovered by Schlomo Pines, which illustrates the opinions of a Jewish community from Syria in the Fifth Century, accuses Paul of Tarse with having falsified the teachings of the Messiah. The false prophet rejected the *Torah* with the intent of attracting to himself the favors of Rome, and of acquiring power and influence, all for his own profit. Flattering the anti-Semitism of the Romans, he would be the true one responsible for the destruction of the Temple in 70. And the text, caught up in the polemical whirlpool of the Fifth Century — an epoch in which the Church invented the legend of "Paul, apostle to the gentiles," winning over the Empire to Christian convictions — rebels against the idea: "His Christianity is only pure Romanism; rather than converting the Romans into Christians, he converted the Christians into Romans."[183]

Elsewhere the manuscript denounces the impostures and contradictions of the canonical gospels and only accords credit to the original Gospel, drafted in Hebrew. The community, claiming the authority of Jacob and Peter for itself exclusively, would be maintained up until the Twentieth Century, according to the Jewish philosopher Saadia Gaon.

Perhaps it was from the same milieu that came a kind of "novel about Paul" that thrashed the official novel of the *Acts of the Apostles.* Epiphany of Salamine (438–496) echoed it in his *Panarion* (30, 16, 6–9):

> They affirmed that he was Greek. According to them, he went to Jerusalem and, after having lived there a certain amount of time, he gave in to an inextinguishable passion for the daughter of the priest. It was for this reason that he was proselytized and circumcised. But when he was shown out by the young woman, he was so enraged that he committed libels against circumcision, the Sabbath and the Law.

* * *

The vogue (no doubt quite limited) for Elchasaitism would resist the Jewish revolt 133–135 that ended with the defeat of Bar Kochba and the end of the Palestinian nation. The future of Christianity henceforth belonged to the Pauline tendency, which would exploit the ship owner and founder

[183] J.-M. Tosenstiehl, "Portrait de l'Antichrist," in *Pseudoepographie,* p. 59.

of Churches, Marcion, before he himself was rejected by the popular development of a Hellenized Christianity, whose the birth in Phyrgia demonstrated the relationship with the Christianity of the prophet Elchasai, implanted in Bythinia.

As far as Simon-Peter, the disciple or younger brother of Jacob, his name derives from the Hebrew *Symeon* and from the Aramaic sobriquet *Kepha,* "rock." Simon the Rock, thus, Simon the Pitiless or Simon the Bald.

His only historical trace leads back to Simon, son of Juda of Gamala and brother of Jacob, put to death as a Zealot. Is he confused with Simon the Essene, whose violent hostility to John the Baptist Flavius indicated? The *Homelies* do indeed execrate Jochanaan. Another mark of Essenism, the *Testamentum domini* (a discourse addressed to the Sons of Light) was inserted into the *Homelies.*

The *Recognitions,* a development and revision of the *Homelies,* preserved a list of couples or syzygies: the Antichrist (*) is opposed to the Christ as Cain is opposed to Abel, Ishmael to Isaac, Esaie to Jacob, Aaron to Moses, John the Baptist to the Son of Man, and Paul to Peter.

(*) It isn't useless to recall that the first description of the Antichrist — like the Christ's horoscope — was discovered among the manuscripts at Qumran.

The authority of Simon-Peter would eclipse that of Jacob around the end of the Second Century. He triumphed over Saul at Antioch, where he acted under the delegation of Jacob. It was in Simon-Peter's midst, in Cesarea, that Clement was instructed and learned from his mouth the doctrine of the "true prophet." The legend of his death, invented by Tertullien and reprised in the *Acts of Peter,* (*) would enter into the dogma of the Church in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries by virtue of the efforts undertaken to be able to offer to Rome, the Emperor and the citizens who were little inclined to embrace Catholicism the unique patronage of the two pillars of faith, Peter and Paul, united despite themselves for the great glory of God.

(*) The text, still admitted into the canon in the Fourth Century, would be rejected as "apocryphal" when the belief in a Peter who founded the Roman Church triumphed. In the Twentieth Century, archeologists and historians amusing themselves with the meaning of Christian duty would strive to discover his tomb. The Light of Faith only illuminated their ridicule.

Barnabas

No historical certitude gives any plausible contours to the person named Barnabas. In his study of the apocryphal books of the New Testament, Erbetta makes him a Levite from Cyprus, a Jewish member of the minor clergy attached to the service of a synagogue.[184] He would have been the companion of a certain Mark, author of a Gnostic, secret gospel in the line of Essene teachings. A *Letter to Theodore* by Clement of Alexandria (end of the Second Century) affirms that this Mark "would compose a gospel of a more elevated spirituality for the usage of those whom one renders perfect [...] Nevertheless, he would not divulge the things that must not be pronounced."[185]

Everything leads one to suppose that the apocryphal text attributed to Mark, the name of which would much later crown a canonical gospel substituted for the Gnostic one, was related by its content to the epistle placed under the name of Barnabas, a text of great interest for the comprehension of Judeo-Christianity at the end of the First Century and the beginning of the Second. In the opinion of Erbetta, the epistle was composed in Alexandria, Syria or Asia Minor, and in its Greek form dates

[184]Erbetta, *Gli apocrifi.*

[185]Cited by M. de Chambrun-Ruspoli, *Le Retour du Phenix, op. cit.,* p. 165.

from the years 117 to 130. Retranscribed by the Sinaiticus manuscript of the Fourth Century, it was held as canonical until Gelase's decree set it aside.

Originally Hebrew or Aramaic, the text defines the program of revising Judaism undertaken by Essenism in its entirety, and more particularly by the sects of the Diaspora that adapted anti-Judean Christianity to the Greco-Roman way of thinking.

The reproach addressed to Pharisian orthodoxy would much later nourish the anti-Judaic polemic. It wasn't a matter of globally rejecting Yahwehism, as Marcion wanted, but expelling the Jews from biblical exegesis, of which they had been "shown unworthy." Did not they choose to interpret the Biblical scriptures to the letter and not in a spiritual sense? The *Epistle of Barnabas* thus recommended the practice of circumcision of the heart and not that of the flesh ("circumcise the heardness of your heart"). The abandoning of circumcision during the rites of conversion indubitably favored proselytism and the adhesion of non-Jewish believers.

Likewise the prohibition of [certain] foods had to be understood symbolically as a refusal to associate with the people kneaded [*petris*] out of immorality. The Temple of Jerusalem had to give place to a true temple that lives in the heart of the believer. So as to more clearly break with Jewish practice, the Sabbath was shifted from the seventh to the eighth day, consecrated *dies domini,* "Sunday" [*dimanche*].

The second part of the epistle corresponds almost completely with the Hebrew manual that was revised, corrected and propagated by Jewish Christians under the name *Didache.* One finds in it in the doctrine of the two roads (*Barnabas,* 18–20), which conforms with the Essenian combat between the Light and the Darkness.

But in the *Epistle of Barnabas,* the two most significant elements of Judeo-Christianity on the road to becoming Hellenized show the obvious influence of Naassenism and a strictly biblical conception of Jesus. For the Christians who were contemporaries with the celebrated letter of Pliny, Jesus — insofar as he is the Christ — is none other than the successor to Moses, Joshua, the holder of the New Alliance, or *Novum Testamentum.*

As for Naassenism: "The fall of Eve was provoked by the Serpent. The Savior wanted to convince them that their sin made them prey to the malediction of death. Although Moses had ordained 'No found or sculpted object shall serve as God to you,' he himself constructed one to represent Jesus. Moses constructed a serpent of bronze; he exhibited it to the eyes of all; and in the voice of a herald, summoned the people to assemble. Once united, they prayed to Moses to intercede in their favor so that they could heal themselves. Moses said to them: 'If one of you is dying, then he should direct himself to the serpent attached to the wood (the cross) and he should fervently put his hopes in He who, though dead, can give life, and at that instant he will be healed'" (*Epistle of Barnabas,* 12, 7).

As for Jesus, his person presents no historical trace at all. There is not the least allusion to the anecdotes complacently reported by the canonical and Catholic texts. He is simply Joshua, son of Noun or Nahum, an angel of God, a co-creator of the world, the alpha and omega, an immanent being without any connection to the events that unexpectedly took place in the era of Tiberias and Procurator Pontius Pilate.

> What then did Moses say to Jesus, son of Noun, after having imposed on him (inasmuch as he was a prophet) this name, uniquely, so that all the people knew that the Father had revealed everything concerning the subject of his son, Jesus? Moses thus expressed himself to Jesus, son of Noun, after having imposed this name upon him, when he sent him to visit the earth: 'Take a book between your hands and write down what the Savior

> says: at the end of time, the Son of God will destroy the entire house of Amalech to the foundations.' Here again Jesus is no longer the son of a man, but the Son of God in flesh through the means of an effigy that preceded him. And as one says that the Christ is the son of David, this very David prophesized full of fear and conscious of the errors of the sinners (*Epistle of Barnabas,* 12, 80).

It is fitting to compare the *Epistle of Barnabas* to a letter attributed to Saul/Paul by the Catholics (not without some embarrassment): the *Epistle to the Hebrews.*

In his *De pudenta* (20), Tertullien attributes the epistle to Barnabas. Luther placed it under the name of Apollos, one of the interlocuters supposedly encountered by Paul.

For Prosper Alfaric, the text (of Alexandrian orgin) took up a *midrash* from the 60s that was revised and Hellenized around 135:

> The Christ, first-born son of God, enthroned Sovereign-Sacrificer, shed his blood 'once for all' so as to put aside sorrow and death from the lives of men. Divine promoter of a New Alliance, he had — upon the order of his Father (5/8) — to humble himself 'for a short time' 'below the angels,' to take human form and submit to a Passion. His death and resurrection rendered the immolations of the Temple null and void, and rendered sacrifices of the race of Aaron useless; because his divine nature, sublimated by suffering, made him the Perfect Victim. Passing for 'the door' to the heavens in which the Just would rejoin him (13/14), he would immolate himself in his celestial sanctuary, not in a temple constructed 'by the hand of man'; he worked the purification of sin by his blood, but he did not take their sins on him and did not become 'malediction.'[186]

The drama of the intemporal Christ excludes all terrestrial historical evidence. Moreover, he did not live on earth: he "appeared" in flesh (9, 26) so as to identity himself with the humans, whom he was charged with saving. The prototype that is suggested here is Melchitsedeq, who was like Jesus "without father or mother, without geneaology, neither having a beginning to his days nor an end to his life." Those who disavow the Christ will be trampled by him (10, 13); gehenna awaits the impious.

Many traits of the primitive kernel of the *Epistle to the Hebrews* are found in the notes that, perhaps, were drafted by Saul/Paul.

Saul, Called Paul of Tarse

Catholics, Byzantines, Protestants and Christians of all kinds have erected Paul and his Christic theology as a pillar of the Church. His biography offers fewer lacunae than that of Holderlin. Bernard Dubourg notes with irony that "Everywhere one speaks of the psychology of Paul, the voyages of Paul, the doctrinal efforts of Paul, the difficulties of Paul, etc. — as elsewhere and as loosely one speaks of the mood-swings of Caligula, the peregrinations of La Perugia, the hypotheses and theories of Kepler and the tribulations of Socrates. That's it: in the knowing rumor, Paul is the Socrates of the Church… Even better, he is the Socrates who writes."[187]

On what is such striking certitude based? On a composite novel that redactors from the end of the Second Century compiled from moral fables and Jewish *midrashim,* the meaning of which escaped

[186]P. Alfaric, *Le probleme de Jesus,* Paris, 1954, p. 21.
[187]B. Dubourg, *op. cit.,* II, p. 149.

them and that they translated and explicated anecdotally, by historicizing the Hebraic myths. And on 14 letters that were written at the time of the instauration of Catholicism and State orthodoxy.

By revealing the incoherencies and impropabilities of the first text, Dubourg emphasizes the *midrashic* elements that are revealed by a retroversion of the text [back] into Hebrew.

According to the *Acts of the Apostles,* Paul was a Jew who became a Roman citizen and was originally from Tarse, in Sicily. He then changed his Jewish name, Saul, to Paul. His writings do indeed carry the traces of many Semitisms that are perceptible in the Greek redaction.

It is impossible to be a Jew and a Roman at the same time, Smallwood declares. The accession to Romanity "involved the duty to participate in pagan social rites and religious observances equally incompatible with Jewish orthodoxy."[188]

That the authors of the *Acts of the Apostles* attributed to Paul a Roman citizenry in Tarse indicates quite well the epoch in which they forged this biographical fantasy. Tarse was not Romanized until the second half of the Second Century. Voltaire did not fail to perceive the following in his *Philosophical Dictionary*: "Was Paul a Roman citizen, as he boasts? If he was from Tarse in Sicily, Tarsis wasn't a Roman colony until 100 years later, all the antique dealers agree."

Paul's pilgrim's journey evokes that of Enea. After a sojourn in Malta, Paul borrowed an Alexandrian vessel so as to return to Rome for the "teaching of the Dioscures" (*Acts of the Apostles,* 28, 11). In the attempt to accord the Hebrew myths and Greek philosophy, in which the symbolism of the Dioscures or Gemeni did not assume a small importance, this apparently journalistic detail awakens echoes of the voyage of the initiate, like that of the Argonauts. In the same way the inventor of Paul — the Christian dualist and anti-Semite Marcion — used his profession as a ship-owner and a man of business to found his own Churches everywhere.

Therefore, through a strange amnesia, the historians and biographers of Paul generally forget to mention that he was indeed a product of Marcion, the *bete noire* for Ireneaus, Tertullien, Justin, Pharisian or Christian Jews and, much later, Catholic apologists.

Nevertheless, it was Marcion and Marcion alone who, around 140 or 150, revealed the existence of 10 epistles written by someone named Paul, the founder of Churches in the East.

And yet letters exist that are anterior to Marcion and that attest to quarrels between diverse communities or Esseno-Christian Churches. The hostility between these groups, some sworn to Jacob, Peter or Thomas, others sworn to Saul/Paul, led Bauer, the historian, to conjecture that the personage of Simon who was caricatured in the *Homelies* is in fact a dissimulation of Saul, who — in the encounter with the "true witnesses," Jacob and Simon Cephas — claimed to have received the revelation of the Messiah.

Who is the original author of Paul's epistles, which were recopied in the Fourth Century, in an atmosphere of dogmatic fabrication, and recasted from the Roman past that the Church of Constantine and Theodore would falsify without scruple? Loisy doubts their integrity and authenticity. Meaks holds seven of Paul's letters to be authentic, attributing *Thessalonians* I and II, *Timothy* I and II, *Philemon, Hebrews* and *Titus* to the Pauline schools of the Second Century.[189]

For Ory, "the interpolations in the letters of Saint Paul are certain and obvious; they dressed up [*travestissent*] the aspect of Paulism in an extravagant manner." According to Deschner, today one recognizes the existence in the First Century of several short notes, echoes of pastorals, polemics and

[188]E.M. Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule* p. 234.

[189]G. Ory, *Le Christ et Jesus,* Bruxelles, 1968; Meeks, *The First Urban Christians,* London, 1983, p. 8.

midrashic speculations on this Messiah whom Saul/Paul never presented as a historical person.[190] The word "Christ" comes from the Bible, in particular, from Esaie; on the other hand, it is not impossible that "Jesus" was an addition made at the beginning of the Second Century.

To whom are the letters addressed? The historians of Catholic and Protestant obedience have designed the *goyim* to be the Non-Jews, whom Catholicism would call Gentiles or *pagani* (pagans).

In Medieval Hebrew, *goyim* has the connotation of impiety, which was emphasized by the anathema: "May their bones rot." Dubourg remarks: "But in the Hebrew of the Bible or Qumran, GWY, GWYM, have the meanings 'nation, nations.' The epistles of Saul/Paul are not addressed to the Romans, Ephesians, Galatians or Corinthians, but to the Jews or Judaified [people] of the Diaspora. They are addressed to the Jews of all nations. They carry traces of the *midrashim* of rival groups, before being revised by Marcion, who cut them loose [*desolidarise*] from their purely Jewish foundations."[191] The letters transmitted the revisionist and anti-Judean theses common to Essenism, Nazarenism, Ebionism and Elchasaitism.

If Marcion used the authority of Saul/Paul to give an apostolic character to the Churches he founded everywhere against Jewish Christianity, this was because he had discovered in them many arguments against orthodox Judaism, nay, against YHWH.

The *midrashim* and polemical fragments of Saul thus fell into Marcion's hands at the moment of the rupture with the Nazarene/Elchasaite current. Marcion recopied them, not without bending their meaning according to the polemical orientations of the time. He intended to federate his Christian Churches by imposing upon them the central reference [point] of Rome, thus announcing two centuries in advance the politics instaurated by Catholicism. Nevertheless, Marcion's authoritarianism and his haughtiness as a man of business (a legend has it that he attempted to buy the Judeo-Christian communities implanted in Rome, of which the *Pastor* of Hermas collated the myths, legends and polemics) set against him the Judeo-Christians and the Hellenized Christians who — hostile to Christian Jews — refused Marcion and his doctrine, judging his dualism and global condemnation of Hebraic mythology (the Old Testament) to be unacceptable.

Revised by Marcion, Paul's letters would then be submitted to the corrections judged to be useful by the anti-Marcionites: Justin, Polycarp, Tertullien, and Ireneaus. In addition, Tatian — the presumed author of the first version of the three gospels called synoptic — improved their aesthetic aspect by finalizing [*paufinant*] and harmonizing them with the Greek version.[192] But Tatian, who was condemned much later for the extreme asceticism that he shared with those faithful to the New Prophecy, which was a book of Pauline epistles to which orthodoxy would require several adjustments to be made. How many revisions, interpolations and harmonizations would follow each other, stacked up, stratified, all to produce the historical authenticity of manuscripts from the Fourth Century! Certain erudite people have, nevertheless, founded their studies and honesty on these letters, arbitrarily [back] dated to the First Century.

The two *Letters to Timothy,* called "pastorals," carry anti-Marcionite developments. (On the other hand, the voyages evoked might well be those of Marcion. The names Titus, Mark and Luke figure in it.) They emanated from the enemies of the ship-owner. The author, who had no scruples about signing it "Paul, apostle of the Christ" would be — according to Deschner[193] — the bishop named Polycarp (second half of the Second Century), who was close to the Christian current of the New Prophecy.

[190] K. Deschner, *op. cit.,* III, p. 99.
[191] B. Dubourg, *op. cit.*
[192] K. Deschner, *op. cit.,* III, p. 99.
[193] *Ibid.,* pp. 100 and 101.

The two *Letters to the Thessalonians* disavow an older letter by Paul.[194]

The *Letter to the Galatians* retains something of the quarrels between the Jews of the Diaspora. The first *Letter to the Corinthians* extolls asceticism and advances the Pharisian idea of the resurrection of the body. The second evokes differences with Apollos.

In the *Letter to the Colossians,* unlike the other texts, the word "church" takes on a Catholic meaning and is thus of a later date.

Priscilla still held the *Letter to the Laodicians* as an authentic text from Paul, when it was a Marcionite text from the years 160–190.[195]

Is it necessary to recall that all of the so-called Catholic letters placed under the names Peter (I and II), John (I, II, and III), Jacob and Judas are forgeries? In the Third Century, Origine mentions them for the first time and judges them subject to controversy.

The correspondence of Seneca and Paul, no doubt inspired by Jerome, "Father of the Church," all-too-conveniently offers a Paul who was the contemporary of Nero and a perfect Roman citizen. These letters met the fate of the letters exchanged between Jesus of Nazareth and King Agbar. Concerning several out-and-out falsehoods, Dauber finds truth more easily in the epistolary fiddling [*tripotages*] of the apostle.

What remains of Saul/Paul after he's been screened by the critique that is legitimate to bring to bear on every dubious historical person?

He was assuredly a Jew, perhaps Hellenized but certainly not a Roman citizen. Perhaps he belonged to Pharisaism, as his legends suggest. In any case, his syncretism retained the idea of the resurrection of the body and an ecclesiatical organization of which the synagogue offered an efficacious model. "It is following the road (*) characterized by those of the party that I would be the God of my fathers, keeping my faith in all that there is in the Law and in what is written by the prophets, having hope in God, as they have it in themselves, that there will be a resurrection of the just and of the sinners."

(*) *Odos,* the "road," and not *hairesis,* the "choice."

Traces of Essenism aren't lacking from the Pauline corpus. Murphy O'Connor detected their presence.

To the doctrine of the two roads, Light and Darkness, to anti-Judaism, to the refusal of the sacrifices of animals in the name of penitential sacrifice, would be added — as indicated by Dubourg — the symbolism of the conversion of Paul on the road to Damascus, not the city, but DMS, the sanctuary. Saul rejected anti-Essene Pharisaism, and encountered the revelation of the expected Messiah. He affirmed the return of the Master of Justice, of the Just Person of whom Jacob affirmed himself to be the brother. He saw him in the light of Essenism. And he founded Churches, arousing the animosity of the established communities that treated him as a false prophet.

If Paul preached the universal Church, it was in strict obedience to the Master of Justice, for whom the Church "wants to be universal, present in the entire world, eternal; it feels itself in communion with Eden and even Sheol."[196]

In the novel called *Acts of the Apostles* there is possible confusion between Paul and the Egyptian, that is to say, Theudas/Thomas. Did not Saul momentarily rally the groups loyal to the "twin brother of the Savior" before erecting himself as privileged witness?

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[194] *Ibid.,* p. 102.

[195] Erbetta, *op. cit.*

[196] M. O'Connor, o.p., *Truth: Paul and Qumran. Studies in New Testament Exegesis,* London-Dublin-Melbourne, 1968.

Just as Moses heard the voice of God in a flaming bush, Saul perceived the Messiah and heard his voice in an illumination. He proclaimed "to have been individually selected apostle by the Christ himself, in a head-to-head to which he was the only witness."[197]

Here is the only holder of the truth, privileged by his own authority among the apostles, which the Qumranian manuscript *Writing from Damascus* makes precise: "Those summoned by a name are [also] those who hold themselves upright until the end of time." But Simon of Samaria used the same expression, in a completely different sense, it is true: the *Hestos,* He-who-holds-himself-upright, is the man who creates his destiny by being aware of the Great Power (the *Megale Dynamis*) present in him. Although the doctrine of Saul/Paul situates itself in a perspective radically opposed to that of Simon, his adversaries would stigmatize him by identifying him with Simon, "who wanted to be God." (In the biblical texts there is a Saul, son of Simon, by whom the polemic was perhaps maliciously inspired.)

Traces of quarrels aren't lacking in Paul's letters. A legendary tradition reported by Eusebius has it that Paul assassinated Jacob the Just. The *Homelies* contain a direct attack on Saul, as Cullmann emphasizes: "Truth doesn't need to be researched in an ecsatic way, but it imposes itself on whomever believes in the true prophet. By this natural road, it was revealed to Peter when he made his confession: You are the son of the Living God. Simon (that is to say, Paul), on the other hand, rested his supposed knowledge of Jesus on a vision that had no value and that conferred upon him nothing of the right to the apostolate."[198]

For their part, the Paulinians didn't spare Peter. The evangelical fable accused him of having repudiated the Christ, of behaving in sum like another traitor, Judas/Thomas. Thus do the apologetic novels translate the quarrels of ascendancy between the diverse Esseno-Christian communities of the First Century.

The *Letter to the Galatians* (2, 11–14) blames Simon-Peter in particular: "But when Cephas went to Antioch, I remained opposed to him because he was reprehensible. Actually, before the arrival of several people sent by Jacob, he ate with the pagans. But when they arrived, he snuck away and held himself aside, for fear of circumcision. Like him, the other Jews dissimulated, with the result that Barnabas himself was taken in by their hypocrisy."

The allusion to circumcision, unimaginable on the part of Saul, a Jew, seems like the intervention of the anti-Semite Marcion (Horace gives the appellation an deceptive connotation and speaks of "turning up one's nose at circumcision").

In the second *Letter to the Corinthians,* Saul objects that "I am not at all inferior to those 'very high' apostles, although I am nothing."

This response emphasizes quite well the nature of the reproach. Another interesting indication appears in the *Letter to Timothy,* falsely attributed to Paul, who not encouraged his interlocutor to live in Ephesus so as to combat those who tell "endless genealogical fables." Isn't one founded in supposing that certain Churches undertook to provide a historical consistency to Jesus who, ever since then, has been very different from the Messiah of whom Saul/Paul spoke?

Because the only Messiah that Paul recognized was the *angelos-christos,* the envoy of Adonai. And on this point his belief accords with those of the Judeo-Christians, the Marcionites and the Anti-Marcionites such as Justin the Apologist. Renan is perceptive when he writes: "For Paul, Jesus is not a man who lived and taught, but a completely divine being."

[197] A. Dupont-Sommer, *Les ecrits esseniens ..., op. cit.,* pp. 378 and 379.
[198] O. Cullmann, *op. cit.,* p. 85.

The irony is that the prophet who was the dearest to the Catholic Church undeniably fell under the blow of an accusation of heresy, dictated by Catholicism through the project of fabricating the historical existence of Jesus: Docetism, the belief in an Angel-Messiah assuming human form for a brief terrestrial and voluntary downfall.

The incarnated Savior, dead and resuscitated, has nothing in common with a rabbi agitating the people, nor with a sage, slightly Brahman, who dispenses his secret wisdom in the *logia* piously and falsely compiled by Matthew and Thomas.

For the Christians who followed Paul, for the Nazarenes, the Ebionites, the Elchasaites, the Marcionites and the Anti-Marcionites (at least up to Justin), Joshua/Jesus had neither childhood, parents, nor any adventure other than his descent into the darkness of matter and his ascension towards the Light. He appeared suddenly, without anyone knowing from whence he came. He was a celestial Adam and a Logos. Even the canonical gospel placed under the name of Mark doesn't know anything about baby Jesus and contents itself with anecdotally putting on stage his remarks (*logia*) of wisdom and his penitential message.

Like all Christians up to the years 150 to 160, Paul was a Gnostic. "In Pauline Christianity," Maccoby writes, "the *gnosis* that the Savior bestows is nothing other than the knowledge of the salvational power of his own sacrifice, which only has meaning if the initiate shares the mystical sacrifical experience."[199]

The Greek text of the letters presents a good number of expressions that were used in Gnostic writings; the Latin and other translations undertook to efface them. Speaking of the assault of the forces of evil against the Messiah, the Greek version says "None of the archons of this aeon (*archton tou ainos toutou*) knew (his glory) because, if they had known, they would not have crucified the glorious Savior" (*I Corinthians,* 2, 8). The Christ is a *pneuma*: "the Savior is the Spirit" (*II Corinthians,* 3, 17).

"If I live, it is no longer me who lives, it is the Christ who lives in me," he writes in the *Epistle to the Galatians* (2, 10), but since Christ is a *pneuma,* Paul is a *pneumaticos,* a "Perfect One" possessed by the spirit that expresses itself in him. (Paul's conception of a pneumatic baptism was opposed to the baptism by water of the Elchasaites and Nazarenes.) And Leisegang remarks: "It is no longer he who lives but the Christ who lives in him, speaking with his mouth, becoming him. Such is the sense in which Simon [of Samaria] was aware of being the Great Power God."[200]

Paul's dualism is expressed by the road of Light and the road of Darkness, the inward man and the outward man, the struggle between the Christ and Belial, chief of the world [*siecle*]. Nevertheless, no allusion to the two Gods puts Jewish monotheism into question for him.

Elsewhere, Paul fought other Gnostics — Nicolaites or Barbelites — in Corinth who estimated that ecstasy, in which the *pneuma* or Holy Spirit reveals itself, gives one the freedom to act according to one's desires (*I Corinthians,* 6, 12, 15, 16). One more time, the choice between a daily practice governed by asceticism or by hedonism determined the demarcation among the various Gnosticisms.

The *Letter to the Colossians* evokes the opposition of the Pauline current to a Hermeticist group that appealed to the astral magic that is carried by amulettes or abraxas [stones]. The epistle explicitly rejects the doctrine of the *stoichea.* One must renounce it to follow the Christ, "because it is in him that the plerome of the divinity truly resides" and "we are enslaved to the elements of the world" (*upo ta stoicheia tou cosmou*). The theory of the *stoicheia* accords with magical rites and incantations such

[199]Maccoby, *op. cit.*
[200]Leisegang, p. 74.

as the "song of the seven planetary vowels," the power to act on heavenly bodies and the destinies of men.

On the other hand, *Letter to the Colossians* alludes to a secret doctrine, secret in the sense that the gospels reveal *apocrypha,* or hidden things. "I know a man in Christ who, fourteen years ago — was it in my body? I do not know, was this beyond my body? I do not know, only God knows — . This man was lifted up to the third heaven [...] and heard the inexpressible words that no man is allowed to repeat" (*II Corinthians,* 12, 2). Valentine, who left Egypt for Rome, where he knew and fought against Marcion around 140: didn't he claim that, "through the intermediary of Theudas, one of the proper disciples of Paul, he himself had understood the secret teachings of Paul"?[201] Therefore Theudas is none other than Thomas, under whose name appeared the *Logia of Jesus* discovered at Nag-Hammadi. The canonical gospel attributed to John is related to the Gnostic gospels by vocabulary and ideas. Thus, the Christ existed *en arche* (at the beginning of the world); he is the *Logos* of God, the *Zoe* (the Life) and the *Phos* (the Light) that spreads the *pneuma* (the spirit) of life. This does not exclude the refusal of Samaritan *gnosis,* which translated the interview between Jesus and a Samaritan woman to whom he explained that the salvation of the Samaritans came from Judea.

The Good News (the Gospel) of Paul constitutes the only gospel to which Christians of all kinds referred until the Third Century. The *Epistle attributed to Clement,* which emanated from a Judeo-Christian milieu at the beginning of the Second Century, let it be understood that the Messiah whose return had been so often promised still had not yet come.

The Good News of Paul — but isn't it rather the Good News of Marcion? — is that the Redeemer is beautiful and well manifested by a suffering Messiah. Jews were not the only ones not to recognize him [Jesus], but they put him to death.

[201] E. Pagels, *Gnostic Gospels,* New York, 1981.

Chapter 11: Marcion and the Hellenization of Christianity

Despite two centuries and an accusation of heresy that separated him from the State religion, Marcion might well pass for the true father of the Catholic Church, a father maladroitly abandoned to the world, a runt that only his enemies brought to maturity.

Missionary zeal; the eagerness to found communities; the hope for divine authority, the investment of which he would receive in Rome; the monarchal organization of the *ekklesiai*; virulent anti-Semitism; the conception of a Christianity purified of its Judaism; a theology inspired by Greek thought: these compose a great many of the fundamental traits of the future Catholic Church.

With Marcion, Christianity — scorning historical truth — arrogated for itself a Hellenic genesis propagated by the myth of Paul, "apostle to the Gentiles." And today, many historians still brazenly ratify the act of birth from Greek origins.

Marcion's talent was that of a businessman. Due to the events of his time, he understood that Christianity renounced any possible future if it didn't break all ties with Judaism, which was disapproved of in the Greco-Roman world because of the endemic state of insurrection in Palestine and [the cities of] the Diaspora.

In 115, the Jews destroyed the temple of Zeus in Cyrene. An agitator named Luknas or Andre (a name annexed by the apostolic legends) took power and was acclaimed King of the Jews. Andre called for the destruction of all the monuments of idolatry before the arrival of the Day of the Savior. The rumor was propagated that insurgents ate their enemies and bathed [*s'oignent*] in their blood. The massacre of non-Jews struck good Greek and Roman consciences with horror; one possessed a letter — emanating from the mother of a general sent to put down the rioters — in which she prayed that her son would not be "roasted by the Jews." One knows how the violent acts of tumults of this type nourished — over the course of two thousand years of religious criminality — the grievances of Catholic, Protestant, Byzantine and atheist mobs that unleashed their pogroms against peaceful ghettos.

The same year, the insurrection of the Jews of Alexandria spread to the Delta and Thebaide, and gained in Palestine, Syria, Mesopotamia and Chypre. In their holy war against the *goyim,* the Jews destroyed Salamine. Around 117, Trajan moved to end the revolts. Ten thousand Jews were executed.[202]

Nevertheless, Simeon Bar Kochba took up arms in 132 and fought against Rome. In 135, he was beaten and killed in his fortress at Bethar. The Jewish nation was banned by Greco-Roman "civilization," in which nobility of thought so easily accommodated itself to the circus games.

Well before the new insurrection, the Judeo-Christians had — unlike the Essenes of the First Century — distanced themselves from the holy war. They refused to give their cooperation to the Messiah Bar Kochba: one of their letters condemned the attitude of the "Galileans." Thenceforth, the Christians would accentuate what separated them from the Jews: the profession of pacifist faith; non-violence;

[202] W.H. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution,* Oxford, 1965, pp. 222 *sq.*

the virtue of sacrifice; the rejection of the Jewish ritual observances and circumcision (all the more because Hadrian, basing himself on the Roman law that prohibited corporeal mutilations, formally prohibited it).

After 135, the persecution pitilessly struck the Jewish communities. Rabbi Hannaniah was burned alive; Rabbi Akiba was skinned alive. In his *Contra Celsum,* Origen would recall the great massacres of the "circumcised." Even if this Christian refused the cult of idols and abstained from offering sacrifices to the Emperor, he loudly claimed his Greek or Roman citizenship and proclaimed his difference from the Jews in an absolute manner.

The anti-Judaic reforms of Marcion survived in the disorder propagated by the political embrace at the heart of the Judeo-Christian churches that were prey to struggles for influence. They advocated an ecclesiatical politics centered upon Rome and strong from its rupture with "Jewry." The rare biographical elements confirm this.

Marcion would have been born in the last years of the First Century in Sinope, on the Pont Euxin (around 95 or 100, according to Harnack[203]).

Marcion soon entered into conflict with the Judeo-Christian communities. His father, the Episcope of an *Ekklesia,* hunted him for having supported opinions hostile to the faith that were, no doubt, inspired by Saul and his disciples. Marcion went to Asia Minor, where he clashed with the local Christian churches, which appear to have been Elchasaite.

A rich ship-owner, Marcion had the practical intelligence of a businessman. His rationality, seduced by Greek philosophy, felt repugnance for the analogic spirit of the *midrashim* and the play of Hebrew words that the Greek translations reduced to absurdities. The bloody and inhuman character of the biblical texts furnished him an argument that was opportunely confirmed by the violence of the Jewish revolts. In place of the larval dualism of the Esseno-Christians, Marcion substituted the irreconcilable character of YHWH, God-creator of a world of war and misery, and a Good God to whom the schools of Jacob, Simon-Cephas, Thomas, Clement and Saul/Paul referred.

Marcion bet upon anti-Judaism, hostility for the people of the Temple, for Jerusalem, for the Pharisians and for the murderers of the Master of Justice. He supported his doctrine with the help of peremptory reasons, promises of a beautiful future in the Church, but, at the moment of struggle, he insulted the voluntary poverty of the communities: he offered 200,000 sesterces to the Roman Churches so as to subject them to his authority, with an eye on an international federation.

Marcion was the first to comprehend that Rome, constituting the center of a civilization that was proposed as an example for the whole world, was the axis of gravitation from which Christianity, purged of its barbarity, hoped to radiate a "universal" glory (the word *catholicon* comes into play towards the end of the Second Century and was popularized in the Fifth. Tertullien would avow: "The Hermetic tradition of Marcion has filled the universe.")

Around 140, in the Roman city in which the churches — still Judeo-Christian — were torn by rivalries for power (according to the contemporary novel by Hermas, *The Pastor*), Marcion met Cerdan, disciple of Satornil of Antioch. He composed two works, which were lost or destroyed by the Church.

The *Apostolicon* is nothing other than a compilation of letters attributed to Saul, Romanized into Paulus. The *Evangelion* expounds the Good News, the unique Gospel, that of Paul, to which both the Marcionites and the anti-Marcionites referred. Basing himself on the letters that he re-copied and rewrote by stripping them of their Semitisms, Marcion thus drafted the evangelical message of Paul.

[203]E. Harnack, *Marcion. Das Evangelium vom fremde Gott,* Leipzig, 1921.

Resch believes the canonical *Gospel attributed to Mark* to be the work of Marcion, which was then corrected by the anti-Marcionites.[204] He notes that Jesus' childhood is not mentioned in it, that the staging of the remarks or *logia* doesn't break with the conception of an *angelos-christos* incarnated in a being of wisdom, that is, an emanation of the Sophia.

In the reaction against Marcion, anti-Marcionite prologues would be added to the Gospels attributed to Mark, Luke and Matthew. Conceived to combat the idea of the Angel-Messiah, they borrowed the traits of a historical Roman person for the allegorical material. The Montanist propagandistic accounts of Pilate, Paul and Peter (the *Gospel of Nicodeme,* the *Acts of Paul and Thecle,* the *Apocalypse of Peter,* etc) contributed to the eventful decor of the drama.

Marcion died around 165, after an adventurous life, in which the journeys of Paul probably represent the antedated marking out [*jalonnement*]. Did he not derive his apostolic legitimacy, everywhere that he presented himself, on the simple assertion that Paul was present several generations previously?

His disciple Apelle followed his work to Rome and Alexandria. He demonstrated the absurdity of the biblical texts in his *Syllogisms* (lost). He seemed, however, to have broken with the Marcionite doctrine of the two Gods. He admitted only one, a good one, the creator of the angelic world, from which would escape a perverse angel, the Demiurge that inclined all things towards evil. Apelle resembled the Christianity of the New Prophecy: he gave to Jesus not a simple human appearance, but a real body and the mission to correct the unfortunate work of the Demiurge. His *Revelations* (lost, if it is in fact not the apocalypse of Paul or Peter) re-transcribed the visions of a prophetess called Philomena. A polemic would oppose her to Rhodon, disciple of Tatian.

* * *

Marcion invented a Western Christianity, one without a Jewish past. He rejected the *midrashim* of the Nazarene and Elchasaite Churches, the elements of which would much later enter into the Greek Gospels attributed to Matthew, Thomas, Jacob, Andre and Philippe. According to Joseph Turmel,[205] Marcion — using the short notes by Saul — gave to his churches, which were "Catholic" before the advent of Catholicism, a Roman master, a citizen of the town of Tarse, which was Romanized in 140 or 150.

His ascetic renunciation did not contravene the morality of Christianity in its entirety (except for the sects in which Naassene or Barbelite syncretism dominated). The New Prophecy, still hostile to Marcionism, abounded in the same practice, if not the same meaning. Marcion refused sexuality, pleasure and even marriage, which was judged propitious for the work of the Demiurge. The New Prophecy limited itself to encouraging detachment from the body to the profit of the spirit.

In its violent rejection of Judaism, this same dualism did not yet assume the scandalous character that State Catholic monotheism would imprint upon it. Does one need an example? In his *Dialogue with Tryphon,* Justin the Apologist — a determined anti-Marcionite — gave to his interlocutor a remark that evoked the trouble that the belief in a Good God aroused:

> We know your opinion on these subjects, but it seems that what you say is a kind of absolutely unprovable paradox; because your assertion that the Christ was God, pre-existing all of the centuries, and condescending to become a man and to be born, not as a man from a man, seems to me not only a paradox but an absurdity. Respond to me at first how

[204] H. Resche, *Die Werkstatt des Marcusevangelisten,* Iena, 1924.
[205] J. Turmel, *Histoire des dogmas,* Paris, 1931–1933.

> you could prove that there is another God alongside he who is the Creator of all things and then show me how this God also condescended to be born from a virgin.[206]

Marcion's missionary activity and his determination to implant non-Jewish and unified churches everywhere did not in itself offer any reason for reprobation because, under the cover of a special effect [*trucage*] proper to the Catholic Church, and to all power, the glory taken away from Marcion would be reflected upon the personage of Paul, the sacred "apostle to the Gentiles."

Marcion's activity displayed such efficacity that in 400 there still existed Marcionite churches in Rome, in all of Italy, in Egypt, Palestine, Arabia, Syria, Armenia, Chypre and even Persia, where Manicheanism developed. He propagated the unique Gospel inspired by Paul as well as the appellation adopted by Catholicism: the Old Testament, to which he opposed the New Testament, translating in this fashion the expression New Alliance, which, according to the manuscripts of Qumran, defined the Church of the Master of Justice.

Leisegang summarizes the conceptions of Marcion as follows:[207]

> The Gospel of the Christ teaches merciful love, while the Old Testament teaches a malevolent punitive justice. The Christ is the Son of a God of love and the faith in this God is the essence of Christianity. The history of the whole world, described in the Old Testament, from Adam to Christ, forms an immoral and repulsive drama, staged by a God who created this world, who is as bad as possible and who, consequently, cannot be better than his lamentable creation. Thus it is impossible that the Christ is the Son of the Creator revealed in the Old Testament. This creator is just and cruel, whereas Jesus is love and kindness personified. Therefore, Jesus is, by his own avowal, the Son of God. He thus can only be the Son of a God completely different from that of the Old Testament. He is the Son of a Good God, residing until now unknown to man and a stranger to this universe, because he had absolutely nothing in common with it. This God is the Unknown God that Saint Paul announced at the agora of Athens. The Christ is his Son.
>
> The Old Testament lost its quality as the Holy Scriptures of Christianity. It did not know the True God and did not know anything about Jesus. The words of the prophets and the psalms, until then considered to be prophecies relative to the Christ, must now submit to a literal reinterpretation, after which they no longer apply to Jesus. The Law and the prophets ended with John the Baptist. John was the last Jewish prophet; like his predecessors, he preached a Demiurge of cruel justice, he knew nothing of the Good God, who remained foreign to all the Jews. That he was also good, Jesus himself confirmed it. He [Jesus] did not cease, in his language as well as in his conduct, to violate the Law of the Old Testament, to disobey the God who instituted it. He declared an open war on the Law, the scribes and the Pharisians. Jesus welcomed the sinners insofar as they had corrupted themselves with those who passed for just in the sense of the Old Testament. Jesus had seen in the last prophet of the Old Testament, John the Baptist, an ignoramus and an subject of scandal. John himself had said that the Son was the only one to know the Father and that, by consequence, all of those who had come before him had known nothing of him, but had preached another God [...]

[206] Cited by M. De Chambrun-Ruspoli, *Le Retour du Penix, op. cit.,* p. 69.
[207] Leisegang, *La Gnose, op. cit.,* pp. 187 *sq.*

> When Jesus spoke of the bad tree that could only bear bad fruit and the good tree and its good fruit, he understood the bad tree to be the God of the Old Testament, which had only created and could only create what is bad. The good tree, on the other hand, is the Father of the Christ, who only produced good things. And, by defending the stitching of a new piece into an old frock and putting new wine into old bottles, Jesus expressly prohibited the establishment of any kind of connection between his Gospel and the religion of the Old Testament, with its God.

And when Marcion wrote, "O marvel of marvels, rapture and subject of amazement, one can absolutely not say nor think what surpasses the Gospel, there is nothing to which one can compare it," he provided the tone for generations of historians for whom Christianity was the product of the Greek civilization and had nothing to do with the Jews.

Nevertheless, Marcion stirred up a lively reprobation in his lifetime. Is it necessary to incriminate his authoritarianism, his extreme rigor, the envy of the other church leaders, the hatred of the Judeo-Christians for whom anti-Judaism did not imply the rejection of the Bible?

The response resided in the reactions and polemics engendered by his theses. Against him were drafted Gospels and Acts that reported that Jesus was a Jewish agitator, put to death by the Jews, certainly, but nourished by the milk of biblical wisdom. The Gospel placed under the name of Luke details the childhood of the Christ, a man born from a woman, even if the *sperma* was called *pneuma,* "Spirit."

Paul, the Marcionite apostle, penetrated into the anti-Marcionite texts in which his "veritable existence" was attested to. Thus, the *Acts of the Apostles,* a novel that presented itself as a historical chronicle, reconciled the apostles Simon-Peter and Paul.[208]

Other texts by Paul were written: the so-called "pastorals." Joseph Turmel has established that the letters of Ignacius of Antioch — the same ones that the tradition cite as the [first] appearance of the word "catholic" — reveal the existence of a Marcionite version (135, at the earliest); before being revised, around 190–210, by another bishop of Antioch, Theophile, who, despite his hostility to Marcion, complacently based himself upon the inspiration of the *Novum Testamentum.*[209] This Theophile did not hesitate to speak of the letters of Paul as the "holy and divine Word [*Verbe*]," not without ridding them of the Marconite word [*parole*]. He also borrowed from Theodotus the notion of the trinity and he would undertake the "harmonization of the Gospels, which thus appeared to him nearly deprived of harmony," Deschner remarks.[210]

So as to demolish Marcion, Theophile was joined by Denyse of Corinth, Philippe of Gortyne, Hippolyte of Rome, Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus of Lyon, Justin the Apologist, Bardensane of Edessa, Tertullien, Rhodon and Modestus; these were mostly men who enjoyed a certain power as leaders of Christian communities.

But the worst enemy of Marcion was Marcion himself. How did a founder of churches, engaged in politics and temporal and spiritual affairs, hope to build the power of God upon the assises of a world that he condemned because it was the work of a Demiurge, a bloody and pernicious God? How could he succeed in planting a Universal Church in an odious society, which simple faith invited one to renounce right away? And to which authority could a bishop refer to durably legitimate a Jesus who had not lived the life of the humble people whom he ruled?

[208] A. Huck, *Synopsis of the First Three Gospels,* 1936.
[209] J. Turmel, *op. cit.*
[210] K. Deschner, III, p. 75.

By breaking with Jewish mythology, did Marcion not remove his credit from a Christianity that was completely borrowed from biblical exegeses? Justin understood quite well who condemned Marcion and explained to Tryphon that — the Jews having lost the key to its interpretation — the Bible thenceforth belonged to the Christians, who were the only ones in a position to confer upon it its true meaning.

Irenaeus, the Bishop of Lyon, was no longer in sympathy with the inventor of Paul, because the *Epideixis* explained Christian doctrine by speaking of the biblical prophecies. Neither was Tertullien, however close he was to he who called marriage filth and an obscenity. Because, if Marcion, despite his dualism, was not a Gnostic — for him, faith (*pistsis*) excelled over *gnosis,* and the adhesion to the Christ was not founded upon knowledge (*gnosis*) — nevertheless he stripped the marytrdom of Jesus of its penitential meaning, because he separated it from the tradition of Esaie and the biblical prophets. Therefore, deprived of the sacrificial model of the man dead upon the cross, the Church lost meaning and usefulness.

Chapter 12: The Inventors of a Christian Theology: Basilides, Valentine, Ptolemy

In the crucible of Alexandria, the expectation of a Savior who would untangle the obscure roads of the destiny of humanity produced such disparate developments as ancient Egyptian wisdom, Greek thought, eastern magic and the Hebrew myths.

From opposite directions, Philo of Alexandria and Simon of Samaria projected the shadow of an absent person who carved into Judeo-Christian asceticism the aspiration of man to save himself.

Against Nazarenism and Elchasaitism, which were forms of Essenism that had been offered up to Greek modernity, there was the will to emancipate oneself from the Gods, which was celebrated by men such as Lucrecius of Rome, Simon of Samaria, Carpocratus of Alexandria and his son, Epiphane. Between these two extremes, various schools, sects, secret or Hermetic societies and inner circles of magicians and sorcerers intermingled and cooked up (for their own uses and according to the rules of existence that they advocated) an astonishing luxuriance of concepts, visions and representations in which the internal and external worlds were coupled (beyond or on this side of the best and the worst) by the most extravagant imaginations.

Here was born — in the daily interpretations of the infernal and paradisical universes, which were rhythmed by riots, pogroms and social struggles — a theology that successive pruning, rational readjustments and polemical reasoning would transform into a dogmatic edifice shakily built upon nebulous foundations [*assises*], which the Church would not cease to sure up through the combined action of bribed thinkers and State terrorism.

When modern historians refuse to follow Eusebius of Cesarea, for whom the Catholic Church had illuminated the world from the beginning of the Christian era, thereby arousing the envy of Satan and his henchmen,(*) perhaps they are attempting to extract from the various philosophical and moral systems that were hastily assembled under the heading of "gnosis" the ideas and opinions from which the dogmatic writings of the New Testament and the theses of Nicaea were born.

(*) "The Churches had already illuminated the whole world, such as the radiant stars and the faith in our Lord and Savior that flourishes in all humanity, when the devil, who is the enemy of good and truth and does not cease to hamper the salvation of men, turned all of his artifices against the Church [...] He left no stone unturned in his attempts to make the impostors and the seducers, who had usurped the name of our religion, fail into the abyss of corruption [along with] the faithful who were attracted to them ... " (Eusebius of Cesarea, *Ecclesiastic History,* IV, 7).

Basilides Of Alexandria

To this day, all we know of Basilides comes from Eusebius's diatribes, which take into account an ancient refutation made to a certain Agrippa Castor by Irenaeus, who was so hostile to Valentine that he stuffed all the Gnostics into his sack of malice towards his adversaries, that is to say, into the *Elenchos,* whose author is determined to demonstrate that gnosis came from Greek philosophy.

What can one divine of Basilides' existence? A contemporary of Carpocratus, he led a Pythagorean school — he conserved Pythagoras' theory of metempsychosis — that was adapted to the tastes of the time in Alexandria. Basilide's renown peaked around 125 or 135. His son Isidore continued his teachings.

Basilides' syncretism encompassed the Judaic elements of Elchasaitism and Naassenism, perhaps due to Philo's influence.

Basilides referred to Barkabbas and Barkoph, the presumed sons of Noah and brothers of the Noria attested to in Naassene, Sethian and Barbelite writings. Clement of Alexandria (who lived between 150 and 215) took him to be the master of a certain Glauius, "disciple of Peter," that is to say, an Elchasaite or Nazarene Christian. Many of his moral considerations would later enter into the remarks that the *Gospels* attributed to Luke and Matthew would attribute to Jesus.

Basilides' morality attempted to trace, through a just moderation, a median route between the extreme asceticism of the Judeo-Christians and the sexual liberty of Carpocratus and the Barbelites. He didn't fail to evoke Pelagius's thesis. Nothing establishes whether the adversary of Augustin [actually] knew the Alexandrian philosopher.

Basilides supposed than man had a will to perfection that was apt to assure his salvation as a spiritual being. According to the relation of each to his sexual impulses, Basilide distinguished three categories of individuals: those who have no attraction to women, the eunuchs and the men of desire whose merit was vanguishing their passions, thereby permitting the triumph of the spirit over the body:

> Certain men have an innate natural aversion to women; if they conduct themselves in conformity with this natural disposition (through abstention from sexual relations), they will do well not to marry. They are eunuchs from birth. The forced eunuchs, the ascetics of the trestle who only dominate themselves so as to attract praise, are those who mutilate themselves and have been rendered eunuchs by accident or by force. They are eunuchs by force and not by virtue of a rational resolution. Those who have rendered themselves eunuchs because of the eternal kingdom, have made this decision due to the natural consequences of marriage, because they dread what the preoccupation with subsistence involves.[211]

For the third category, Basilides — the enemy of an obsessive abstinence and the ferocity that it involves — extolled the virtues of intermittant relief and assuagement, submitted nevertheless to the regulations of the will and the spirit:

> Do not throw your soul in the fire by resisting the fear of lacking continence day and night, because a soul that exhausts itself in an uninterrupted resistance cuts itself off from hope. Thus, take for yourself — as I have told you quite clearly — a woman of temperment, so as to not be diverted from the grace of God. And when you have extinguished the fire of desire through the seminal effusion, pray in good conscience. But if (...) you desire not to act perfectly in the future, but simply so as not to fall, get married. (*) However, if such [a man] is young or poor or weak, and follows the counsel of the Master, he should not get married. He should not separate himself from his brother, but says: I am going to a sanctuary, nothing more can happen to me. He keeps a distrust of himself, and he says: brother, lay your hands on me so that I do not sin, and he will obtain spiritual and

[211] Clement of Alexandria, *Stomates,* III, 1, 1–3.

> sensible help. It will suffice that he wants to do good for him to do so. Many times it happens that we say with our lips that we do not want to sin, whereas our thoughts persist in sinning. Such a person can not do what he would like, uniquely through fear of incurring punishment. There are in human nature things that happen by necessity and by nature, and things that are simply natural. Thus clothes are necessary as well as natural. But the pleasures of love are only natural, we are not constrained by them.[212]

(*) This remark would be reprised, no doubt in an anti-Marcionite sense, in the first *Epistle to the Corinthians* (7, 9), attributed to Saul/Paul: "Better to marry than to burn."

The responsibility of the individual in the choice of a virtuous morality extends to suffering or experiencing misfortune; they are punishments for faults. The sense of guilt and the identification of nature as the source of contamination [*souillure*] and impurity proceeds from a Judaic vision that Christianity inherited. Even the child is guilty of power.

> I say that all those who have incurred this affliction have received this good turn thanks to He who leads all with gentleness, because they have sinned, but their faults remain hidden. If in fact one had grievances against them for anything else, it would be that they do not suffer this pain in the capacity of prevaricators, for the bad actions that they have committed; they are not outrageous, like adulterers and assassins; but because they are Christians, He summons them to suffering, which consoles them, with the result that they imagine themselves not suffering. Some have incurred suffering without having sinned at all, but this is very rare. And still he doesn't fall under the blow of suffering because a cunning power has set traps for him, but it is necessary to envision his pain as that of a child who suffers, though, apparently, it has not sinned (…) It is an advantage for the child who has not sinned or, at the very least, has not committed any sin of action, but still carries the disposition to sin within him, to fall into suffering and undergo many misfortunes; likewise, no man, even those who are perfect and have committed no sins of action, falls into suffering and suffers in the same way that the child does. He carries within himself the disposition to sin; if he has not sinned, this is because he has not had the occasion, with the result that there is no place to inscribe innocence to his credit. Whoever has the intention of committing adultery is an adulterer, even if he has not committed the act; whoever has the intention to committ murder is a murderer, even if he hasn't executed it. It is the same with the innocent [child] of whom I spoke; when I see him suffering without having done anything evil, I say that he is bad, because he has the intention of committing sin. Either that or impute the evil to Providence. Perhaps you will not keep my words in mind and you will think to get me into trouble by misquoting me and saying: this one or that one there has sinned because he suffers; I would respond, if you permitted me to do so: he hasn't sinned, he resembles the child who must suffer. If you insist with more vehemence, I will tell you: whatever man you show me, he will still be a man; only God is not a man. No one is free from contamination, as has been said.(*)[213]

(*) *The Book of Job,* 14, 4. Such ideas nourished the letters attributed to Saul/Paul.

[212] *Ibid.*
[213] *Ibid.,* IV, 12, 83.

A fragment attributed to Isidore, son of Basilides, expounds a theory that Catholicism would later adopt on the question of free will:

> When you have convinced someone that the soul is not simple, that it is the force that is inherent in him that gives birth to the worst passions, the bad people can say nothing better than this: I was forced, I was pulled in, I acted despite myself, I did such an act against my will, whereas he himself has in fact inclined his desires towards evil and has not struggled against the powers of the matter that is inherent in him. We must show ourselves to be the masters of the inferior part of our natures by using our reason.

To found in the cosmos his morality of the "perfect," the "pneumatic" or "man according to the spirit," Basilides appealed to a cosmogony, many elements of which filtered into future theological quarrels. Leisegang justly establishes a connection between the idea of a superior God (Basilide) and the conception known under the name of Denys the Areopagite.[214]

Basilides:

> There was a time in which nothing existed; this nothing was not one of the existing things but, to speak clearly, without any detour, without any kind of artifice, absolutely nothing existed. When I say, 'existed,' I am not affirming that the nothing 'existed,' but to make what I mean to say understood, to know that absolutely nothing existed.[215]

Pseudo-Denys:

> We go higher, we now say that this cause (God) is neither soul, nor intelligence; that it possesses neither imagination, nor opinion, nor reason, nor intelligence; that it can neither express nor conceive; that it has neither number, nor order, nor grandeur, nor smallness, neither equality nor inequality, nor similitude; that it does not see, that it does not remain immobile nor does it die; that it neither keeps calm, nor possesses power; that is neither power nor light; that it does not live nor is it life; that it is neither essence, nor perpetuity, nor time; that it is not intelligible; that it is neither science, nor truth, nor royalty, nor wisdom, nor [the] One, nor unity, nor deity, nor good nor spirit in any sense that we might understand; neither filiation, nor paternity, nor anything that is accessible to our knowledge, nor to the knowledge of any other being; that no one knows it such as it is, and that it itself does not know any being; that it completely escapes reasoning, naming and knowing; that it is neither darkness nor light, nor error, nor truth; that it absolutely can not affirm anything nor deny anything; that when we pose affirmations or negations that apply to realities that are inferior to it, we neither affirm nor deny anything, because all affirmations remain on this side of the unique and perfect cause of all things, [and] because all negations reside on this side of the unique and perfect cause of all things, because all negations reside on this side of the transcendence of He who is naturally [*simplement*] stripped of all and situated beyond everything.[216]

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[214] Leisegang, *op. cit.*, p. 146.
[215] *Elenchos,* VII, 20.
[216] Pseudo-Denys the Areopagite, *Theologie mystique,* Paris, 1943.

Therefore, from this God — who is all-being and all non-being, and *Sige,* pure Silence (the disciples of Basilides were apparently required to be silent for five years) — ejaculates a seed from which three entities were born. The first was the Son of God, *consubstantial* with his Father, and the term used by Basilide is the famous *homoousios* around which the quarrel of Arianism and the break with Byzantium would be organized. The Son is thus of the same nature as his Father. The second birth was that of the *pneuma,* the Spirit, the flash of God plunged into matter that aspires to return to its celestial kingdom. And the third, the veritable scrapings of the divine sperm, is none other than the earth, the body, matter, fortunately clarified [*eclairee*] by the *pneumatic,* spiritual flash.

The *pneuma* frolicked between two spaces: the inferior cosmos, our universe, and a hypercosmos. Therefore, the *pneuma,* by raising itself up and believing that it attained the highest place, made itself the Lord (archon), created a son who appeared so beautiful to him that he placed him on his right. He then conceived the Ogdoade, or the eighth heaven, in which he reigned over the celestial creatures.

When the ethereal beings were ordered to rise, still issued from the *Logos Spermaticos* that produced the divine nothingness, a second archon was summoned to rule over the other seven heavens or *Hebdomade.* The archon of Hebdomade is he who spoke to Moses and identified himself with the Demiurge. His creation multiplied the material and spiritual traps that the pneumatics had to overcome to regain the *Pneuma,* co-regent with the Lord of Ogdoade.

In the same way that sin entered the world because the first archon claimed a power than wasn't part of its nature, the sin of man resides in the will to power that incites him to surpass the limits of his nature.

Extreme asceticism *and* license depends upon sin, because they both set themselves aside from the just milieu in which Epicurean morality thrived.

Much later Irenaeus would present a version of Basilides' theology, to which would be joined the fragments of the legend of Jesus:

> From the unengendered Father, Nous was engendered first; from Nous was engendered the Logos; from the Logos Phronesis, Phronesis Sophia, Sophia and Dynamos [were engendered] the Virtues, the Powers and the Angels whom he named the first ones, and it was by them that the first heaven was created. From this came other angels who made a second heaven similar to the first. From these angels proceeded [still] others, in their turn and in the same fashion, in the image of the superior angels, and these angels formed a third heaven. From this third heaven was born a fourth, and thus there followed, in an analogous fashion, the Princes, Angels and 365 heavens. It is from this number of heavens that the year also has 365 days. The last heaven, the one that we see, is filled by the angels who made everything that is in the world. They shared the earth and all the people who are on it. Their leader is the God of the Jews. This last one, because he wanted the other people to be subjected to his people, that is to say, to the Jews, the other princes raised themselves up against him and paralyzed his plans. This was why the other people were animated by hostile sentiments with respect to his people. But having seen their corruption, the unengendered and innumerable Father sent his unique Son, Nous, who is called Christ, to deliver those who believe in him from the domination of those who made the world. He would manifest himself as a man on the earth to their people and accomplish the powers. But it wasn't he who suffered, it was a certain Simon of Cyrene who was forced to carry his cross to its place. He was crucified by error and unconsciously, after which he was changed by Jesus so that he would be taken for him. Jesus took the form of

> Simon and mocked them, because he remained nearby. He was the incorporeal power and the unengendered Nous; this is why he transformed himself at will, and he thus returned to he who had sent him, mocking those who had not kept him back and he was invisible to all. Those who knew this were delivered from the Prince and Creator of this world. It isn't the crucified one who must confess, but he who was crucified in appearance, that is to say, Jesus, who had been sent by the Father to, by this action, destroy the works of those who had made the world. Thus the one who confessed the crucified man was a slave to the power of those who created the world of bodies; on the contrary, the others were free; they knew how the unengendered Father had spared them all. But the redemption only extended to the soul, because the body can only dissolve itself in conformity with its nature… Likewise with the prophecies of their leaders who had made the world, the Law, in particular, of he who had made the people leave Egypt. Sacrifices to the gods had to be condemned and held as nothing, but one could take part in them without scruple; [one] was likewise indifferent to any action and the exercise of any voluptuousness. They likewise practiced magic, the evocation of ghosts and all of the other magic tricks; they invented all sorts of names for angels, and put some in the first heaven and some in the second, and they applied themselves to distinguishing the names, principles, angels and powers of their (…) 365 heavens. It was thus, for example, that the world to which the Savior descended and from which he ascended was called Kaulakau. In the manner of Kaulakau, he who knew all the angels and their origin became invisible and ungraspable to all the angels and the powers. Just as the Christ was unknown to all, they must not be recognized by anyone, they are invisible and unknowable to all, whereas they know all the beings and can cross them all. 'You, who know all, but no one knows you!' — such is their formula […] Few people are capable of this knowledge, one in a thousand, ten in six thousand. They are no longer Jews, they say, and only Christians. (*) It is forbidden to reveal their secrets, one must keep them in silence. They determined the site of the 365 heavens as if they were mathematicians. They borrowed their theories and applied them to the particular requirements of their doctrine. Their leader is Abraxas; the numeric value of this name is 365.[217]

(*) They constituted a branch from the Esseno-Christian bush, but a Hellenized branch, different from Marcionism, although the absence of women from their cosmogony confirms their tendency towards asceticism.

Disentangled from the Christianity of the 180s, in which Irenaeus disguised the Basilideans, their syncretism suggested — due to the importance given to Abrasax and magic carvings, called abraxas — a connection to the cult of Mithras, from which the sects devoted to Joshua/Jesus borrowed the image of a solar divinity. It is probable that Basilide facilitated the exchange between Mithraism and Christianity.

The importance of magic, on the other hand, appears unquestionable. Bonner studied the talismans that bear representations of Abrasax, the *angipede* divinity with the head of a rooster, thus uniting the sun and the earth, light and darkness, male and female.[218]

Based on the reports concerning Abrasax and Mithras:

[217]Irenaeus, *op. cit.,* I, 24–6.

[218]Bonner (C.), *Studies in magical, gnostic amulets,* London 1950.

> Jerome (*) notes that Basilides designated his all-powerful God with the magic name Abraxas; by adding the respective numerical values of each Greek letter in this name, one can obtain the number of circles that the 'Sun' describes in the course of a year; this is the same god as Mithras, [because] this name, although formed with different letters, totals the same numerical value:
>
> A-B-R-A-S-A-X
> 1+2+100+1+60+1+200 = 365
>
> M-I-T-H-R-A-S
> 40+5+10+9+100+1+200 = 365
>
> From then on, the meaning of the 365 heavens is clear. Just as the circuit of the seven planets distinguishes seven heavens, each circle of the sun-form describes a heaven, that is to say, a spherical envelop traced [*dessinee*] by the circle. Therefore, each day the circle traveled is slightly different from than that of the preceding day, and it is thus that, following the Egyptian calculations, which count months of thirty days each, there are three-hundred-sixty circles or heavens. The five other circles echo the planets, except for the sun and the moon, which are assigned particular roles, and also echo the leap [*intercalaire*] week of five days, which is the same thing, since the days of the week carry the names of the planets. The sun is Helios, and Mithras-Abraxas is the Archon who embraces the totality of the solar circle as a unity. Mithras and Helios are in a father-son relationship. Mithras is the Great God; Helios is his Logos, thanks to which he developed himself, created the world; and he played the role of mediator between man and God. He had the same function as the *Christos-Logos*; see the 'liturgy of Mithras' and the speech of Emperor Julian about King Helios.[219]

(*) Jerome, *In Amos* III (*P.L.,* XXV, col. 1018 D).

According to Basilides, the Great Archon had a son, the Christ of Ogdoade. The Hebdomade then had his Archon and he, in his turn, [had] a son, also a Christ, the solar Christ, the simultaneously divine and human counterpart to the superior Christ of the Ogdoade.

Thus Abrasax became the prototype of the *Christos-Helios* and the time that he governs.

> Abraxas, like Mithras, designates the God who unites in himself the power of the seven planets, because his name is composed of seven letters. These seven letters have the total value of 365; it follows that he contains within him 365 partial or subaltern gods. As temporal grandeur, he contains everything in a year or each year that the world sees; he is the Aeon, the Eternity. Each partial god presides over one day. An echo of this belief subsisted in the calendar of the Catholic Church, in which each day carries the name of a saint, the king of that day. The Christian gods had simply taken the place of the pagan gods.[220]

[219] Leisegang, *op. cit.,* p. 171.
[220] *Ibid.,* p. 172.

Valentine And The Valentinians

In a letter to the consul Servianus, Emperor Hadrian (117–138) gave an idea of the confusion of messianic sects then called "Christian":

> Hadrian Augustus to the consul Servianus, salut! I have found in Egypt, about which you boasted to me, only a fundamentally frivolous nation, inconstant, at the beck-and-call of the first quack [*cancan*] who comes along. The adorers of Serapis are Christians and those who call themselves Christian bishops adore Serapis. It is impossible to find in Egypt an archisynagogue, a Samaritan or a Christian priest who is not an astrologist, a forecaster or a charlatan as well. When the patriarch comes to Egypt, some implore him to adore Serapis, others to adore the Christ. They only have a single God. He is adored by Christians, Jews and all the other peoples.[221]

It was from the microcosm of Alexandria that Valentine came; along with Philo and Basilides, he was the father of speculative theology. Evading the troubles and repressions of the last war of the Jews, he went to Rome, where he stayed from 136 to 140; [while there] he crossed paths with the Judeo-Christians, whom the *Pastor* of Hermas deplored for their dissension; Marcion and his Pauline Churches; the disciples of Carpocratus, for whom hedonism traced out the road of salvation; and the mobs of bishops and leaders of Christian sects of uncertain doctrines, satisfying their appetites for domination everywhere possible.

A brilliant rhetorician, a poet, and the author of letters and essays, Valentine only shared with Christianity a certain propensity to asceticism and references to a redeemer, the Christ-Logos or a spiritual entity charged with guiding souls towards the kingdom of the ineffable and good God. He was the author of the treatise *Of the Three Natures* (lost) and the *Gospel of Truth,* discovered at Nag-Hammadi.

Did Valentine prophesize in the manner of Elchasai or, twenty years later, Montanus, Priscilla and Maximilia, the initiators of the New Prophecy? Nothing permits one to be assured; but note the importance accorded to ecstasy in a later report made by Epiphanius of Salamis:

> An indestructable spirit, I salute the indestructables. I announce to you unspeakable mysteries, inexpressible and supra-celestial, which can not grasp the Powers, nor the Dominations, nor the subordinated Forces, nor any composed being, but which are only manifested in the thought of the Immutable (*Panarion,* XXXI, 5, 1–2).

The Valentinian theological system developed the cosmogenesis of Basilides into a complexity that evokes tortuous scholastic discourse. According to the *Gospel of Truth,* the divine world or Plerome (which expresses well the modern term "totality") is founded on a duality: the Ineffable, the male principle, and Silence, the female principle. From their coupling was born a second duality and from it [came] a quaternary principle, the whole forming the Ogdoade (2+2+4=8). There were eleven couples of Aeons (entities, powers, forces), men and women designed this amorous adventure of creation, which was as foreign to Judaism as it was to Catholicism. The total was 8 + 22, that is 30 Aeons, of which the last one, the youngest, is none other than Sophia. Relegated to the place furthest away from the primordial duality, Sophia is engrossed with desire and revolt, and engenders the Demiurge, the God of *Genesis* and the world.

[221] Flavius Vopiscus, *Saturn.,* VII, 8.

By striving to separate its desire from the obscurity that reigns beyond the Plerome, Sophia abandons in flesh a fragment of spirit and soul. So as to save the spirit imprisoned in matter, the celestial Messiah sends the Christ Jesus to teach men the nature and destiny of their souls, with the result that, crossing the threshold of death, he returns to his place of origin.

Platonism, which is inherent in the idea of a world that imperfectly reflects the primordial Aeon, explains through which bias Valentine's theology prefigured the simplified and desexualized version of Catholic dogma, but also announced the quibbles of the theologians from Arianism to Jansenism.

As for Jesus, if he is no longer Joshua — because Valentine's Christianity wanted to be purely Greek — then he remains the descendant of Sophia, *pneuma* or Spirit, here designated by the term Logos.

In a poem, Valentine illustrated another remark, which the *Elenchos* [mistakenly] ascribed to him (VI, 42, 2): "Valentine claims that he saw a new-born, he asked it who he was; the baby responded that he was the Logos." This manner of proceeding, on the part of the author of the *Elenchos,* illustrates well the anecdotal reduction of a philosophical discourse. Here is the poem, retranscibed by the *Elenchos* (VI, 36, 7):

> I see in the ether everything mixed in the *pneuma,*
> I see in the spirit the *pneuma* carrying the totality:
> The flesh suspended by the soul,
> The soul carried away by the air,
> The air suspended from the ether,
> The fruits coming from the abyss,
> A small child emerging from the matrix.

It was in reaction against such conceptions that the gospels recounted the childhood of Jesus, his escapades, and his family. They principally derived from popular Christianity, a Christianity that rejected the abstractions and elitism of the Valentinians, because they required exemplary legends to support their martrys and faith, *pistis.* The New Prophecy, carrying even further the simplicity of Elchasaitism, condemned speculations about the Savior, Sophia, the Good God and the bad world, which were incomprehensible to the humble people. In his *Stromates* (II, 3), Clement of Alexandria wasn't deceived when he wrote: "The Valentinians attribute to us the faith of the simple people; as for them, they claim to possess gnosis, because they are saved by nature, they have the advantage of superior semen; they say that this gnosis is extremely far from faith; according to them the pneumatic is separate from the psychic."

Clement was also a philosopher but, in the manner of Irenaeus, the Bishop of Lyon, he adhered (if not directly) to the New Prophecy, at least to the fervent movement that it inspired and that would only later alienate his excessive taste for martyrdom and aggressive puritanism. Irenaeus would take up the pen against "so-called gnosis," while Clement identified gnosis with the Christian faith, but both chose, against a Hellenization of Christianity that assimilated it little by little into a renewal of Greek philosophy, the social and non-violent embrace — in the churches and under the authority of the bishops — of poor and rich people, for whom the mythical and ecumenical spirit described a Jesus for the first time stripped of his angelism and portayed as an agitator: the one who chased the merchants from the Temple, healed the unfortunate, incurred the betrayal of his friends, submitted to an infamous death and resuscitated in glory in the kingdom of the heavens, according to the hopes of the Montanist martyrs. (Clement would write a homely on the question Which rich man can be saved?

in which he extolled the collaboration of the classes in the detachment from the goods of this world. An echo of this would be retained by the composition of the *Gospel attributed to Matthew* towards the end of the Second Century.)

Nevertheless, the future theological corpus of the Church would come from Valentine. The *Tripartite Treatise* discovered at Nag-Hammadi reveals a trinitary conception of God, composed of the Father, the Son and the *Ekklesia* (in the sense of "mystical communities of the faithful" illustrated by Hermas). According to Tertullian, the same conception can be found in the works of Heracleon, a disciple of Valentine. Theodotus, also a Valentinian, spoke of the Father, the Son and the *Pneuma*-Spirit, more than a century and a half before Nicaea.

The *Treatise on the Resurrection* (Nag-Hammadi), which is of Valentinian origin, supports a doctrine according to which "the resurrection of the believer has already happened" and that exhorted the Christians to live like they had already been resurrected. The New Prophecy fought against a similar assertion and two letters placed with impugnity under the name of Paul, the *Epistles to Timothy,* undertook to combat the Valentinian argument.

The *pneumatics* or Perfect Ones thus attempted to accede to the state of pure spirit. Their conception of Jesus responded to their aspirations, as the son of a carpenter, the friend of the poor, corresponded to the populism of Montan.

According to Clement,[222] the Valentinians believed that Jesus "ate and drank, but did not evacuate. The power of his continence was such that food did not spoil in him, because there was no corruption in him." Perhaps the Barbelites and the Carpocratics were not wrong to make fun of such a concordance between spiritual asceticism and constipation.

The uncorruptable Logos thus becomes the principle of eternity: "You are immortal since the beginning, you are children of eternal life, and you want to experience death so as to exhaust it and dissolve it, and death will die in you and through you. Because when you dissolve the Cosmos without being dissolved yourself, you dominate creation and all corruption."[223] Admirable remarks, if they did not involve a perspective that is radically hostile to life, because it implies a spiritualization in which the body and its desires are reduced to precisely nothing.

Valentinianism did not exclude a relationship with Hermeticism, especially as developed by Mark. A certain Monoime — in all probability a symbolic name, like Allogene or Autogene — based himself on the iota of *Iesou* and was inspired by Plato and Pythagoras when he argued, as quoted by the *Elenchos* (VIII, 14): "The roots, the octahedron, the tetrahedron and all similar figures of which fire, air, water and earth are composed, come from the numbers enclosed in the simple stroke [*trait*] of the iota, which is the Perfect Son of the Perfect Man." Such doctrines would flourish among the doctors of Kaballah and among the learned men of the Renaissance, such as Marsile Ficin. According themselves poorly with the political will of the bishops and their flocks to push Jesus toward the steps of the Imperial Palace, they only encountered condemnation and scorn.

Ptolemy

Ptolemy occupies a particular position in the Valentinian school. He is known through a *Letter to Flora* that Epiphanius retranscribed in his *Panarion,* not without garnishing it with quotations from

[222] Clement of Alexandria, *Stromates,* III, 6, 59.

[223] *Lettre de Ptolemee a Flora,* translation and notes by G. Quispel, Paris, 1949.

the canonical Gospels with the care of a Catholic to ratify the ancient age of a dogma that distorted [the thought of] the perverse and heretical Ptolemy.

Confronted with the variety of doctrines that composed Christianity in the second half of the Second Century, Flora had lost the light of the Spirit. Marcionism and anti-Marcionism were then agitating the Christian, Jewish and Greco-Roman milieus.

Ptolemy esteemed himself so much better prepared to suggest a philosophical surpassing of the two positions that he confessed his past adherence to Marcionism: "Me, who had been gratified from the knowledge of the two Gods."[224]

More than two centuries after the birth of Essenism, the problem of Mosaic law continued to nourish speculations in the milieus preoccupied with the choice of a religious route.

> My dear sister Flora. Until now, few people have understood the Law given by Moses, because they did not exactly know the legislator, nor his commandments. This will be quite clear to you, I think, when you have understood the contradictory opinions running within it. Some say that it was given by God the Father; others, on the opposite side, maintain that it was established by the Adversary of God, the corruptor-devil, in the same way that they also attribute to him the creation of the world, affirming that it is he who is the Father and the creator of this universe. Both positions are entirely in error, mutually contradictory and neither of the two camps have grasped the truth of the subject.[225]

Ptolemy distinguished three iterations [*etats*] in Mosaic Law: a Law of God, a Law of the Jews, and a revision according to the Spirit (the *pneuma*), which founded Christianity.

> The *Law of God,* pure and free of all inferior alloy, is the Decalogue, the ten commandments divided into two tablets, which prohibit what is necessary to avoid and commands what must be done; these commandments, no doubt pure, were still imperfect and clamored for completion by the Savior.
>
> The *Law mixed with Injustice* was given for vengeance and talion against those who committed injustice and ordained the tearing out of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, and to punish murder with murder. Because he who commits an injustice in the second place isn't less injust than the first; there is only a difference in the order, the work is the same. Moreover, the commandment is and remains just, decreed because of the weakness of the addressees in the case of a transgression of the pure Law. It only hinders he who is not in accord with nature nor with the goodness of the Father of All. Perhaps this presciption responds to its goal, but it only explains itself through a necessity. Because he who does not want a single murder be committed by decreeing 'You will not kill at all,' and who ordered the killing of a murderer in reprisal, has given a second law; and by distinguishing two kinds of murderers, he who has prohibited all murder hasn't seen that he has been devoured by necessity. This is why the Son sent into the world by God abrogated this part of the Law, in full knowledge that it was also the Law of God; because he placed it in the Old Testament, along with the other commandments, when he said: '*God* said: He who curses his father and mother must be killed.'

[224]Cited by Leisegang, *op. cit.,* pp. 203 and 204.
[225]*Ibid.,* p. 206.

> Finally, there is the *typical part of the Law,* instituted in the image of the pneumatic laws *par excellence*: I understand it to be the presciption relative to sacrifices, circumcision, the Sabbath, fasting, Easter, unleavened bread, etc. All these practices, being only images and symbols, have received another meaning, the truth manifested for the first time. They have been abolished in outward form and their corporeal application, but they have been restored in their pneumatic meaning; the words remain the same, [but] their content has changed. Thus the Savior ordered us to offer sacrifices, not sacrifices of animals bereft of reason or aroma, but sacrifices of hymns, praises, acts of grace, charity and benevolence towards the next person. Likewise, we are to practice circumcision, not that of the corporeal foreskin, but that of the pneumatic heart. The Savior requires fasting, not corporeal fasting, but pneumatic fasting, which consists in abstaining from all evil. We nevertheless observe outward fasting, because it can be of some profit to the soul, if it is practiced with discernment, if one doesn't observe it so as to imitate others or by routine or because it is the day of fasting, as if a day could be fixed for that. One practices it at the same time that one recalls true fasting, so that those who still can not observe this practice have the reminiscence, thanks to outward fasting. Likewise, the Easter lamb and the unleavened bread are images, as displayed by the Apostle Paul. 'The Christ, our Easter, has been immolated,' he says, and 'so that you know what is unleavened; do not participate in the leaven (what you call leaven is evil), but so that you know a new dough.'
>
> Thus, the part that is uncontestably the Law of God is divided into three parts. One was accomplished by the Savior, because the commandments — 'you will not kill at all, you will not commit adultery, you will not make false oaths' — are included in the defense against anger, coveting, and swearing. The second part was totally abolished. The commandment 'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth,' which is mixed with injustice and itself contains a work of injustice, was abolished by the contrary commandments of the Savior, because the contraries were mutually exclusive.
>
> Finally, it [the Law of God] divides into a part that is transposed and transformed from the corporeal to the pneumatic; the symbolic part that is given to the image of the laws *par excellence.* Because the images and symbols that represent other things have a value as long as the truth does not appear; now that the truth is here, one must make works of the truth, not works of the image. This is also what the Apostle Paul and his disciples displayed; they alluded to the symbolic part, as I have said, with respect to the image of Easter and the unleavened bread, and to the part of the Law mixed with injustice, when he said: 'The Law of the Commandments has become obsolete through a new teaching' (*Ephesians,* 2, 15); and he alluded to the part not mixed with evil when he said: 'The Law is holy and the Commandments are holy, just and good.'[226]

If these citations from Paul participated more in Judeo-Christian revisionism than in the revisionism of Marcion, the end of the letter sketches out a return to monotheism. Thanks to the instigation of Augustin of Hippone and his thesis of the weakness of man, Catholicism would develop the Ptolemian explication of the evil introduced into the world.

> As much as this is possible in a short space, I think I have sufficiently shown you the intrusion into the Law of a legislation of human origin, as well as the division of the Law

[226] *Ibid.,* p. 208.

> of God itself into three parts. It remains for me to say what is good about this God who established the Law. But this as well I believe I have already shown you by what preceded, if you were paying attention. Because if this Law was not instituted by the perfect God himself, as I have said, nor by the devil (which isn't even permitted to say), then the legislator must be a third, in addition to the others. It is the Demiurge and the creator of this whole world and all that it contains. It is different from the other two essences, an intermediary between the two; one rightly gives to it the name of Intermediary. And if the perfect God is good by essence, which is true — because our Savior said that there is only one good God, his Father, whom he manifests — and if the God of contrary essence is bad, wicked and characterized by injustice, then the one who stands between the two, being neither good, nor bad, nor injust, can be called just, because he judges in conformity with justice. On the one hand, this God would be inferior to the perfect God, beneath his justice, since he is engendered and not unengendered (a single one is unengendered, the Father from whom all things come, because all things depend on him, each in their own way); on the other hand, he would be greater and more powerful than the Adversary. He would thus be, by nature, of a different essence and a different nature than the essence of the two others. The essence of the Adversary is corruption and darkness — because it is material and of multiple forms — whereas the unengendered essence of the All is uncorruptable and light itself, simple and homogenuous. The essence of the Demiurge gives birth to a double virtue, but it is only, in itself, the image of the Good God. Now, do not worry about how the unique and simple principle of all things (which we confess and we believe), how an unengendered, uncorruptible and good principle has come from the essences of corruption and the Intermediary, which are of dissimilar essence, whereas it is in the nature of good to engender and produce beings that are similar and of the same substance.[227]

Ptolemy then announced in his letter-preamble to a Christian [rite of] initiation that Flora had to elevate herself to a superior degree of instruction. His status as leader of a community or bishop, legitimized by a claimed apostolic filiation, authorized him to advise such instruction as this:

> Because, if it pleases God, you will later learn the origin and the birth of the natures, when you are worthy of the tradition of the apostles, a tradition that I have also received through succession and I can confirm these words through the instruction of our Savior.
>
> I am not worn out, my sister Flora, from having said this in many words. I said to you clearly that I would be short, but I have nevertheless treated the subject exhaustively. These remarks can help you further on, if after having received the fecund seeds, like the beautiful and good earth, you will one day bear their fruit.[228]

Thus an elitist Christianity that substitutes the refinement of a philosophical tradition for the crude matter of Hebraic mythology penetrated into the aristocratic and cultivated milieus of the Empire. Upon this Christianity of *ecolatres,* which would be the source of the future Catholic theology, there was suddenly unfurled a wild Christianity, fanatical and popular, which turned the misery and resentment of the disinherited classes into virtues of renunciation and sacrifice. Its programme inscribed

[227] *Ibid.,* p. 209.
[228] *Ibid.,* p. 287 and 288.

itself in the remark, hostile to the "pneumatics," loaned to the Jesus of the no-accounts [*laisses-pour-compte*]: "Happy are the poor of spirit."

The *Pistis Sophia*

A late text (from the Third Century), the *Pistis Sophia* forms a passably embroiled, esoteric novel in which the remarks seem to obey a concern with according two antithetical notions: *pistis* (faith) and *gnosis* (knowledge). Leisegang summarizes it as follows:

> One is in the twelfth year after the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus recounts for his disciples, united on the Mount of Olives, his voyage across the world of the Aeons and the Archons, whose power he had broken. In the course of his ascension, he encountered Pistis Sophia, whose adventures he described at great length. In the beginning, she dwelled in the thirteenth Aeon; the desire for the superior world of the light made her raise her eyes towards the light of the heights. She thus drew upon herself the hatred of the Archons of the Twelve Aeons; it is necessary to understand by this [reference] the masters of the heaven of the permanent ones, who correspond to the twelve signs of the Zodiac. It is between this heaven and the domain of the light, in the intermediary place, beyond the world limited by the heaven of the stars, which Sophia inhabits. A false light attracted her towards the world and she became stuck in matter. Desperate, she addressed thirteen prayers of contrition to the light of the heights and implored that she be saved from the snares of her enemies. When she arrived at the ninth prayer of contrition, Jesus was sent into the chaotic world on the orders of the first mystery. He transported Sophia from the Chaos to a place secluded from the world. Pistis Sophia then addressed to God a suite of hymns of thanks, because he saved her from her distress. Finally, Jesus ascended and led Pistis Sophia — that is to say, the emanations of the Great Invisible — and their unengendered and their auto-engendered and their engendered and their stars and their odd ones [*impairs*] and their archons and their powers and their lords and their archangels and their angels and their decans and their liturgies and all the dwellings of their spheres and all the orders of each one of them. And Jesus did not tell his disciples about the extensions of the emanations from the Treasury nor their orders, and he did not tell them about the guardian who is at each of the doors to the Treasury of Light, and he did not tell them about the place of the Twin Savior who is the Child of the Child, and he did not tell them about the place of the three Amens, the places in which the five trees grow, nor anything about the place and the extension of the seven other Amens, that is to say, the seven voices. And Jesus did not tell his disciples what kind are the five parasites, nor where they are placed; he did not tell them in which fashion the Great Light is deployed, nor in which places it is placed; he did not tell them about the five regions, nor anything concerning the first commandment, but only spoke to them in general, teaching them that they exist; he did not speak of their extension nor the order of their places… It is a swallowed world that reveals itself to us in this indefatigable enumeration of supra-terrestrial entities, celestial regions and magic symbols; a world in which the first readers

of the book must find themselves perfectly at ease among the Aeons, decans, liturgies, archons and angels, the innumerable mysteries and their places.[229]

[229] *Ibid.,*

Chapter 13: Marcos and the Hellenization of Jewish Hermeticism

Irenaeus vituperated the Hermeticist Marc (or Marcos) in his *Refutation of So-Called Gnosis,* [thereby] unveiling his sympathies for the contemporary movement of the New Prophecy, many faithful people of which perished in the pogroms of Lyon in 177. He made fun of the favors that the aristocracy lavished upon him [Marcos], "the dames of the robe bordered with purple" (a privilege of the senatorial classes) and their propensity to the pleasures of love. True or false, this anecdote — so often plagiarized by Inquisitorial reports — translated the reprobation of popular Christianity for the "sins of the flesh":

> One of our deacons from Asia, badly taken with him, welcomed him into his house. As his wife was nicely made, the charlatan seduced her body and soul, and she followed him for a long time. Finally, and not without difficulty, the brothers converted her. She did not cease being penitent and cried about the outrage that the charlatan caused her.[230]

Breaking with *gematria* — interpretation from the numbering of the Hebrew letters — Marcos belonged to the Jewish milieu of Palestine or the Diaspora. He frequented Alexandria, where he was subjected to the influence of Philo, Basilides, Carpocratus and Asia Minor, which was the birthplace of Elchasaitism and so-called "Montanism," and Gaul, where Irenaeus combatted it.

Marcos renewed the feminine nature of the Spirit (Achamoth or Sophia). This was the meaning of the [rite of] initiation that he practiced, although Irenaeus' report does not exclude an erotic usage of prophetism, taken up by the faithful of Montan: "After having introduced the germ of Light into the woman that he initiated, he declared to her: See, grace has descended upon you. Open your mouth and prophetize! If she stammered that she didn't know how to prophesize, he made invocations and repeated: Open your mouth, say anything, you will prophesize."[231] It is pleasing to recall here the original identity of the *pneuma* and the *sperma,* and the orgiastic character of the vocal modulations ascribed to the prophetesses of the past.

According to the *Elenchos,* Marcos reproduced the miracles that the fairytales of Montanist propaganda diffused concerning the Jesus who passed from *angelos-christos* to the Zorro for the poor. Before the faithful, he transformed water into wine, poured it into a small goblet that he decanted into a large one miraculously filled to the brim. His prietesses then administered the beverage in the guise of communion.

When the Church of the Fourth Century raged against the New Prophecy and its puritanism (which was called "Encratism"), its polemic would calumniously maintain the confusion between Montanism, which accorded certain sacerdotal functions to devoted women, who were sanctified by their virginity, and the cult of Marcos, in which women incarnated the spirit that impregnated bodies with love, a practice that the Church only perceived in terms of "license," "debauchery," and "fornication."

[230] Irenaeus, I, 13, 5.
[231] *Ibid.,* I, 13 *sq.*

Due to a natural malediction, fanaticism never resists the temptation to expound — by saving it from annihilation — the doctrines that are the object of its execration. Irenaeus thus surrendered precise information about the teachings of Marcos, which were the meeting point between Pythagorean mysticism and Jewish Kabbalah.

The *Sige* of which Basilides spoke, the Silence of the Nothing-God, had (according to Marcos) deposited in himself, as in a matrix, the germ of the Tetrad or Quarternary. In Hebrew, tetrad or quarternary is *kolorbas,* which the heresiologues transformed into a certain Colorbase, a disciple of Marcos.

The tetrad, an emanation of the Ineffable God, descended from the invisible places in the form of a woman. She revealed to him her proper essence and the genesis of the All.[232]

> In the beginning, when the Apator — unconceivable, without essence, neither male nor female — wanted to render his ungraspable nature graspable, and to render his invisible nature visible, he opened his mouth and emitted the Word (Logos), equal to himself. The Logos placed itself before him and showed him its essence, because it was the visible manifestation of the Invisible. The pronunciation of the name took place in the following manner: he said the first word of his name, this being
>
> A P X H
> 1 2 3 4
>
> It was composed of four letters. Then he pronounced the second word that was also formed from four letters. Then came the third, which contained ten letters. The following one contained twelve. The pronunciation of the whole name included thirty letters and four words. Each of these elements has its particular letters, its own particular character, its particular pronunciation, its particular aspect and none of them know the figure of the word of which it is only an element, not even the pronunciation of its neighbor; through its own sound, it imagines itself to pronounce the All. Because each of them takes the sound that is its own for the All, whereas it is only a part of the All, and it does not cease to resonate until, in its emission, it reaches the last letter of the last element. After it, the restoration of the All will take place when the All is a single letter and will be the single and self-same emission of the voice; following the Marcosians, the image of the pronunciation would be represented by the Amen that we say together. The sounds form the substanceless and unengendered Aeon; they are the forms that the Lord calls angels and that uninterruptedly see the face of the Father. The common and expressible names of the letter-elements are Aeons, *Logoi,* Roots, *Sperma,* Pleromes and Fruits. As far as their individual and particular names, they are — following Marcos — contained in the name of the *Ekklesia.* The last sign of the last letter of these elements makes its proper voice heard; the sound of this voice will go out and engender — in the image of the letters — its proper elements; it is from this that the things of our world have been made and that have engendered those that came before them. The letter itself, of which the sound follows the echo from below, was reprised on high by its proper syllable so as to complete the entire name; as far as the sound, it remained below, rejected from the beyond. The element itself, from which the sign is descended with its pronunciation, is composed of thirty letters and each of these thirty letters contains in itself other letters, thanks to which the name of

[232] *Ibid.,* XIV, 1 *sq.*

> this letter is determined; and these last letters, in their turn, are designated by other letters and so on, with the result that their multitude extends to infinity, because each one is spelled in its turn with letters. The following example will make what one means to say better understood: the letter Delta contains five letters. These letters in their turn are spelled by means of other letters and so forth. Thus if the structure of the Delta already decomposes into an infinity of parts, with each letter engendering others in their turn and relaying others, how much more vast would be the ocean of letters of this primordial Element. And if a unique letter is in fact infinite, you see the abyss full of letters of the entire name — following the *Sige* of Marcos — of the Propator. The Propator, aware of his incomprehensibility, gave to the elements that Marcos called Aeons the faculty of making each one re-echo its own pronunciation, a single one being incapable of expressing the All.

Then comes the evocation of the Naked Truth, in which each part of the body corresponds to letters, themselves adjoined to the twelve signs of the Zodaic, the twelve planets, the twelve hours, and the twelve masters (the Archons) of the entities or tutelary powers (*daimon*):

> After having revealed this, the Tetraktys said to him: I want to show you Aletheia herself; because I have made her descend from the dwellings on high so that you can see her naked and so that you can remark her beauty, so that you can even hear her speak and so that you can admire her wisdom. Look on high:
>
> her head A
> her neck B Y
> her shoulders and her hands T X
> her bosom D Q
> her diaphram E T
> her belly Z T
> her sex H E
> her thighs O P
> her knees I N
> her legs K O
> her ankles A E
> her feet M N

The ancient tradition, probably issued from the Jewish milieu in Alexandria in the First Century, enlightened the remark reprised in the *Apocalypse attributed to John*: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, said the Lord God, He who is, He who was and He who will be, the All-Powerful." (Dubourg has indicated the Hebraic origin of the formula "He who has been, is, will be" as follows: "The Hebrew verbs are not conjugated in the past, present or future (...) but to the accomplished or unaccomplished."[233] For example, the accomplished form of the verb to say [MR] means: he says/has said/will say, completely, absolutely; the unaccomplished form [Y'MR] means it is/was/will be in the process of saying.)

[233] B. Dubourg, *L'invention de Jesus, op. cit.,* I, p. 245.

The entirety of the correspondances between the letters and the Aeons constitute the Plerome. By grasping an Aeon in its globality, magic allows action upon the universe. (Manuscript 44 at Nag-Hammadi consequently contains an invocation of the vowels. The "symphonia" or song of the seven vowels, each of which each represents a planet, allows, through its combinations, the expression of the harmony of the celestial spheres and the action on the stars. [Charles] Fourier would expound a similar conception. The universe, conceived as language, loans its meaning to Kabbalistic and magical investigations.)

By annexing the Logos Jesus, the syncretism of Marcos defined itself as a Christianity and perhaps reveals why an agreement existed in Alexandria and Antioch, towards the end of the First Century or the beginning of the Second, between the schools of Satornil of Cerinthe, Peter, Jacob, Thomas and Saul concerning the secret name of the Messiah, the biblical Joshua erected as a symbol of revised Judaism.

Its Hellenized version probably refers to the same calculations that intrigued the esoteric circles to which Essenism gave the tone (cf. the horoscope of the Messiah, the interpretation of the letter *Waw* or *Episemon,* the sixth letter of the Hebrew alphabet):

> When the Tetraktys said these words, Aletheia looked at him and opened her mouth to pronounce a word (Logos). This Word became a name and the name is that which we know and say: Christ Jesus. This name pronounced, she immediately returned to a profound silence. As Marcos expected her to say more, the Tetraktys advanced to speak again: Have you thus considered as so insignificant the Word that you have heard from the mouth of Aletheia? It is not a question here of the name that you know and believe that you have possessed for a long time. You have only known the sound; you are not aware of all its virtue. Because IHEOYE is an insignificant name to all; it is composed of six letters and it is invoked by all of the appeals.
>
> The three primordial elements, which compose three pairs of powers (*Pater* and *Aletheia, Logos* and *Zoe, Anthropos* and *Ekklesia*) and that together yield the number 6, and from which proceed the twenty-four letters, if one multiplies them by four, that is to say, by the Logos of the Ineffable Tetrad, yields the same number as the letters — that is to say, twenty-four. These twenty-four elements belong to the Unnameable. They are carried by the six powers so as to produce the resemblance of the Invisible. The images of the images of these elements are the three doubled letters that count double, as six letters; so, by virtue of the analogy, one adds them to the twenty-four letters and one obtains the number 30. As the fruit of this calculation and this economy, there appears in the resemblance of an image he who, after six days, climbed the mountain as fourth and became sixth, who redescended and was retained in the Hebdomade, being himself the Ogdoade and possessing in him the complete number of the elements. This number was revealed by the descent of the dove when he came to be baptized. The dove is the omega = 800 and the alpha = 1, because its numeric value is 801.
>
> It was for the same reason that Moses said that man was formed on the sixth day (the name IHEOYE is composed of six letters); this is also why the salutary economy of the Passion was accomplished on the sixth day; it was the preparation by which the last man appeared for the regeneration of the first. The beginning and the end of this economy of salvation was the sixth hour, the hour at which he was nailed to the wood. Because

the Perfect Nous, knowing that the number 6 contains in itself the virtue of creation and regeneration, manifested to the sons of the light, by the *episemon* that appeared in him, the regeneration that is worked by him [...]

As far as Jesus, here is his ineffable origin: from the Tetrad, Mother of All, came the second Tetrad in the manner of a daughter; thus the Ogdoade was formed; from it came the Decade. This was the origin of the number 18. Thus the Decade, come to join with the Ogdoade and multiplying it by ten, would engender the number 80, and the number 80, multiplied again by 10, produces the number 800, with the result that the total of the letters, allying the Ogdoade with the Decade, is 8, 80, 800, which is Jesus, because the name Jesus has the numerical value of 888:

I H E O Y E
10 8 200 70 400 200 = 888[234]

[234]Leisegang, *op. cit.*, pp. 227 and 228.

Chapter 14: Carpocratus, Epiphanius and the Tradition of Simon of Samaria

In the encounter with the generally ascetic Christian current, which was propagated in the Second Century by gnostic esotericism and by the *pistis* of the New Prophecy, the teachings of Carpocratus and his son Epiphanius inscribed themselves in a line of life that only Simon of Samaria knew how to trace in thin strokes on the tormented grays of the era.

Carpocratus' biography remains obscure. Origen confused him with Harpocratus, son of Isis and Osiris, a solar god under Greco-Roman domination, often represented in the magic papyrus seated on a lotus, the male principle penetrating the feminine principle so as to impregnate her with his light. Carpocratus taught at Alexandria and wed Alexandreia. Their son, Epiphanius, who died at the age of 17 in 138, was interred on his island of birth, Cephalonia. Around 155 or 156, a philospher named Marcellina taught the doctrines of the father and the son in Rome.

Clement of Alexandria had the merit of retranscribing a short extract by Epiphanius on justice:

> Justice consists in a community of equality. A single heaven deploys itself and embraces the entire earth within its circumference, the night shows all of the stars equally; as for the sun, author of the day and father of the night, God makes it shine on the earth from on high, equally for all the beings who can see. They see it all in common, because he makes no exception for the rich, the beggar or the sovereign, dumb or wise, female or male, free man or slave. The brute animals themselves have no difficulty in seeing the sun, because God has poured the light of the sun on all creatures from on high, as a communal good, and he proves his justice to the good as well as to the wicked; thus no one possesses more, nor steals from the next so as to double his own share of light. The sun makes the pastures grow for the communal enjoyment of all the animals and his justice is distributed among all, in common and in equality. It is for such a life that the species of the cow was made, as well as each individual cow, that of the pigs as well as each individual pig, that of the sheep as well as each sheep, and so on. Because justice manifests itself in them under the form of a community.
>
> Moreover, all is spread out in equality for the species following the principle of community; nourishment is spread out for the beasts that graze, for all equally, and without being ruled by law; on the contrary, nourishment is provided by the liberality of the Master for all in conformity with his justice. Even concerning generation, there are no written laws; because these would be false laws. The animals procreate and engender in the same fashion, and practice a community that was inculcated in them through justice. The Creator and Father of All gives sight to them all in common, and his legislation consists exclusively in the justice issued from him. He does not make a distinction between men and women, reasonable and without reason, one being and another. With equality and communally he shares sight and he gives it equally to all, through a single and self-same

> commandment. As far as the laws, which do not punish men who are ignorant of them, there are those who have learned them so as to act against the law. Because particular laws fragment and destroy communion with divine law. Do you not understand the word of the Apostle: 'I have only known sin through the law'? By this, the Apostle meant that mine and yours only entered the world through the laws and that this was the end of all community. Because what remains in common for those who neither enjoy property nor goods, not even marriage? And yet God created for all, communally, the vineyards do hunt the sparrows nor the thieves, and likewise the cereals and other fruits. But it was from that day that the community was no longer composed in the sense of equality and was deformed by the Law, which produces the thief who steals animals and fruit. God created all for the communal pleasure of mankind, he united man and woman for a communal intercourse [*commerce*], and he likewise coupled all the living beings to manifest his justice as community in equality. But those who were born thanks to this have denied their own origin from the community that reconciles mankind. They say: 'He who marries her must guard her,' whereas all can share her, as the example of all the other living beings shows.

[And yet] Epiphanius still teaches in proper terms that "God placed in male beings a powerful and impetuous desire to propagate the species, and no law, no custom, can exclude it from the world, because it is the institution of God. Thus the words of the legislator: 'You must not covet' (*Exodus,* 20, 17, and *Deuteronomy,* 5, 21) are ridiculous and still more ridiculous is what follows: 'the goods of your neighbor,' because the same God who gave to man the desire destined to couple beings with a view towards generation [also] ordained the destruction of desire, although he did not take it from any living being. But the most laughable of all is 'the woman of your neighbor,' because this reduces the force of community to separation."[235]

Epiphanius' text, which is of an astonishing modernity, participated in a thought and a behavior that was radically hostile to Stoic, Epicurean and Christian morality.

Carpocratus and Epiphanius both belonged to a Greek milieu that rejected Judaism. In the same way that Simon of Samaria restored the spirit of the *Pentateuch* and *Genesis,* in particular, to the body, Epiphanius mocked the biblical commandments, the notions of sin and guilt. The Law of Moses fomented crime for the same reason that prohibition engenders transgression.

Thereafter, either quotations from Paul were recovered from the ordinary revisions made by the heresiologues, who added canonical extracts to them so as to blunt the dissent of doctrines that had nothing to do with Christianity, but who nevertheless annexed the Messiah Joshua, as well as Serapis, Seth, Abrasax and Harpocrates into their own syncretism; or these quotations referred back to a Paul who was completely different from the image that Marcion and his successive manipulators presented, that is, a Saul/Paul whose teachings would [in turn] justify the use of the name of Simon [of Samaria], whose doctrines had been travestied by the Elchasaites living under the rule of Trajan.

Written when Epiphanius was 15 or 16 years old, the work of the young man whom Jacques Lacarriere has called the Gnostic Rimbaud links social equality to the free exercise of desire. His critique of property goes beyond the Rousseauist conception, and one had to wait until [Charles] Fourier and the radicality of individual anarchy, with its principle "We only group ourselves according to affinities," for there to be an echo of the precocious genius of Epiphanius of Cephalonia.

[235]Clement of Alexandria, *Stromates,* III, 2, 9, and 3, 9.

I do not see why Marcellina, a disciple of Carpocratus and Epiphanius who taught in Rome around 160, would have decorated his school, in the words of Irenaeus, "with painted icons enhanced with gold, representing Jesus, Pythagoras, Plato and Aristotle,"[236] unless it wasn't simply an occasion for the Bishop of Lyon to condemn the Christians who preferred Greek philosophy to the Bible.

On the other hand, it is probable that the community founded on the liberty of desire drew the idea that "the soul must be tested before death" from Pythagorean theory, because, "for Epiphanius, desire is the expression of the first will of God and nature."[237] And according to Simon, desire is to be identified with fire, the principle of creation and the principle of passion; there is nothing that can limit it in the unity of the macrocosm and the microcosm.

Epiphanius applied his conception of justice to mankind, the animals and the plants. The living perpetuates itself by changing form. Irenaeus interpreted this theory, which seemed strange and odious to him, in terms of magic and metempsychosis:

> They also practice magic, incantations, amorous love potions and love feasts, the invocation of the spirits of the dead and the spirits from dreams, and other forms of necromancy, claiming that they have power over the princes and creators of this world and over the market in all creatures of this world. At this point, they have so loosened the bridle on aberration that they claim to have complete freedom to commit any act that pleases them, impious or atheist; although it is human opinion that makes all the difference between a good act and a bad one. The soul, they say, must — through a migration of one body into another — exhaust all forms of life and possible action, if it did not do so in its first life. We do not dare to say, nor hear, nor even think about nor believe that such things take place in our towns; but their writings teach that, before death, the soul must be completely tested until the final rest.[238]

A line by Irenaeus stands out: "It is faith and love that saves; the rest is indifferent and only human opinion distinguishes between good and evil."

According to Simon's *Megale Apophasis,* faith in oneself and love lead to the Great Power, which resides in each person and moves the world. What is astonishing is the fact that, in a letter by Paul, the theme of faith and love gives birth to an enthusiastic development that explodes with misogyny and ascetic harshness, which is attested to everywhere in the epistolary works of the man who, successor to Moses, stole the title of Apostle from him: "When I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, if I lack love, I am merely resonating metal, a resounding cymbal. When I have the gift of prophecy, the science of all mysteries and all knowledge (*gnosis*), when I have the most complete faith, that which moves mountains, if I lack love, then I am nothing. When I give all my belongings (to those who are starving), when I surrender my body (like a slave, so as to have pride), if I lack love, then I have gained nothing. Love takes patience, love renders service, it is not jealous, it is not breast-plated, it does not inflate with pride, it makes nothing of ugliness, it does not seek its own interest, it does not become irritated, it does not rejoice in injustice, but finds its own joy in truth. It protects all, it believes all, it endures all. Love will never disappear […]" (*Epistle to the Corinthians,* I, 13).[239] Which anti-Marcionite,

[236] Leisegang, *op. cit.,* pp. 180 and 181.

[237] Leisegang, *La Gnose, op. cit.,* p. 179.

[238] Irenaeus, I, 25.

[239] *Translator's note*: As elsewhere, all parenthetical insertions (thus) were made by the author, Raoul Vaneigem. Note as well that the wording of this passage, I *Corinthians* 13: 1–8, in the *Revised Standard Version* (1952) is quite different: "If I

capable of penetrating into the labyrinths [*ces auberges espagnoles*] of Paul's epistles, brough forth this fragment of Carpocratic doctrine and inserted it into a Christian perspective?

speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends […]."

Chapter 15: The New Prophecy and the Development of Popular Christianity

Born under the pressure [*l'impulsion*] of the Zealot guerrilla war and the struggle against Greco-Roman oppression, the messianism of the First Century participated exclusively in a Judaisim that was on the road to reformation, hostile to the Sadduceans and the Pharisians.

The sects that speculated on the secret name of the Messiah did not agree with those devoted to Joshua in the 80s and 90s, who developed a philosophical and esoteric doctrine that was hardly propitious for wide distribution. The Elchasaite Christians, who aroused the suspicions of the governor of Bythinia, Pliny the Younger, offered the very first example of a Christianity implanted in less firm milieus. They practiced social aid to widows, orphans, and the disinherited; imitating the prescriptions of honor in the Pharisian communities, they prayed to and celebrated the God-Messiah (*christo quasi Deo,* in the words of a letter by Pliny).

Their numerical importance still had not yet aroused the distrust of the authorities, beyond Bythinia, neighboring region to Phrygia, where the cults of Attis and Mithras were still dominant. Here was the first de-Judaized and exoteric Christianity, a mass Christianity — of a kind to tickle the Saint-Sulpician imaginations of people like Sienkiewicz and *tutti quanti* — that rejuvenated, a century later, the martyrs of the New Prophecy so as to throw them into Nero's lion's den.

It isn't useless to insist upon it: the Church behaved towards the various Christianities from which it issued like Stalin, who excluded from history the first Bolsheviks by erecting Lenin as a holy apostle. The true Christianity, that which gave a historical existence to Jesus, invented Mary, Joseph, the Child, the popular agitator, the enemy of the Jews, the good thief put to death under [the reign of] Tiberias, the re-grouper of the apostles of rival churches, and the first references to Pontius Pilate: the Christianity that engendered new thinkers, who — incurring the names Phrygian heresy, Montanism, Pepuzism, Encratism — would be excommunicated from the Church by Tertullian in the Fourth Century.

While the Marcionite Churches brandished the authority of the Apostle Paul with the support of programmatic letters and clashed with the traditional Judeo-Christian communities, the Christianity preached by the prophet Montanus became successful in Phrygia and soon after in North Africa, Palestine, and Asia Minor, and then turned towards Rome and won over Gaul.

Montan addressed himself to the disinherited, slaves, artisans and rich people who had renounced their goods, and no longer to the exegetes versed in the interpretation of mythological writings, or to the biblical rats that nibbled on words so as to nourish their ascendency over a handful of disciples.

The important thing was no longer *gnosis,* knowledge, learning that disentangled the obscure roads leading to salvation, but faith, the *pistis,* the desire [*le sentiment*] to belong to the army of the Christ, the disposition to sacrifice one's life for him as he sacrificed his life for the profit of mankind, whatever nation or social class to which they belonged.

The movement that was propagated under the name New Prophecy countersigned the birth of a veritable, modern Christianity, stripped of its Judaity, a Christianity that took exception to gnostic

intellectuality and [instead] taught the principles that remained long-lived until the decline of Catholicism and Protestantism: sacrifice, the renunciation of the goods of this world, voluntary poverty, the taste for martyrs, the consecration of suffering, chastity, virginity, abstinence and misogyny, the execration of pleasure and the repression of desire.

Although variously received according to the region and the [local] church — the Marcionites and the pneumatics scorned it, the bishops who were tolerated by the imperial power dreaded its ostentatious pretensions to martyrdom — the New Prophecy attracted a large membership and, for the very first time [in the history of Christianity], organized a powerful federation of churches, in which the rival obediences to Cephas, Jacob, Thomas, Clement, Saul/Paul, nay, even certain fringes of Naassenism and Sethianism, were subsumed. [Ironically,] this was the evangelical Christianity about which various millenarians and apostolics — strugging against the Church of Rome, which had been born in the corruption of temporal power and would remain power and corruption — had dreamed.

* * *

Around 160, the prophet Montan, in whom Christ was supposedly [re]incarnated, preached the good word in Phrygia and Mysie. He was seconded by two prophetesses, Prisca (or Priscilla) and Maximilia, which was an innovation that was in flagrant contradiction with Judeo-Christianity and Marcionism.

The New Prophecy announced the end of time. It was a millenarianism to which Irenaeus and Hermas showed themselves to be receptive. Asceticism was erected as a rule of conduct. The faithful, invited to repent, to fast and to purify their sins, would inauguarate the New Jerusalem, destined to concretize the location of the two market towns of which all traces have been lost: Pepuze and Tynion.

Montan's syncretism drew abundantly from the great competing religion, that of Attis. From this epoch comes communion through bread and wine, identified with the flesh and blood of the Messiah, which were used in the rituals of Attis. For the voluntary castration of the priest of Cybele-Attis was substituted the castration of desire, abstinence and the virtue of virginity to which certain believers showed themselves to be so attached that they preferred punishment to renouncing it.

The provocative taste for martyrs soon attracted the aggressive ardors of the crowds, always disposed to relieve themselvers of the weak and the resigned, and those of the functionaries who were delighted to furnish a diversion away from their politics of despoilation and malfeasance.

Around 166 or 167, the pogroms in Smyrna involved the death of the bishop Polycarpus. Thereafter, Polycarpus — the putative author of a letter from the Church of Smyrna to the community of Philamalium, in Phrygia, and subsequently suspected of adhering to the New Prophecy — was celebrated in the *Acts* that exalted his martyrdom. But Eusebius of Cesarea, made an informer for the proceedings of the Church, took care to add an anti-Montanist interpolation, as Campenhause has proved.[240]

The New Prophecy dominated Carthage, where Tertullian would shine, and in Lyon, where Irenaeus defended their millenarianism and asceticism. In Rome, the New Prophecy enjoyed the favor of at least one bishop, Eleuthera. Several pogroms that indiscriminately massacred Jews and Christians decimated the adherents to the New Prophecy in Lyon and Vienna in 177, and in Palestine in 178. Tertullian would sing the praises of the martyrs of Scillita, lynched in 180. The persecutions that the new Christians attracted, as a lightening rod attracts lightening, engendered in willingly anti-Semitic mindsets [the desire to commit] more massacres that were no longer encouraged by the cunning

[240]Frend, *Martyrdom and and Early Christianity,* p. 288.

consent of the procurators who played the role of Pontius Pilate washing his hands, but were ordered by the imperial power.

The quest for martrys even provoked the repugnance of their persecutors. Did not Tertullian report, in a protest that was addressed to the pro-consul Scapula — *Ad Scapulam,* 5, 1, from 212 or 213 — that in 185 the pro-consul of Asia, Arrius Antoninus, encountered a group of Christians carrying knotted cords around their necks and asked who sentenced them? The pro-consul sent them back, telling them that if they wanted to commit suicide, there were cliffs and precipes from which to throw themselves.[241]

It would happen that such an ostentatious propensity for death sanctified by punishment would arouse the prudent reprobation of the bishops, nay, the simple Christians who estimated that continence and privation sufficed to guarantee their happiness in the beyond. These same reservations would be revived in the Third Century, when Novatian's movement would revive the New Prophecy in its most extreme aspects; and, in the Fourth Century, when the Donatists and the Circoncellions excommunicated the *lapsi,* the priests who abjured by arguing that a living priest was better than a dead one when it came to propagating the faith.

The New Prophecy encountered the hostility of certain leaders of the *ekklesiai.* The Episcope of Anchiale, in Thrace, took measures against its adepts in 177, while the persecution was raging in Lyon. A certain Themison produced against the new Christianity an *Epistola ad omnes ecclesias,* which Rufin would hasten to interpret as a definite reference to Catholicism. (In reality, Montanism founded the first, actually popular ecclesiastical universality [*catholicon*], which was no longer elitist, as Marcion's had been.) The bishop Meliton of Sardinia was also dead-set against the prophetic rage of Montanism in *On the Christian Life and the Prophets.* He had the best reasons in the world, because, in the manner of Justin, he addressed to the emperors apologies and appeals in favor of a religion for which he solicited tolerance. One also cites [in this context] Theophile of Antioch and Athenagoras.

Around 195, Apollonios of Ephesus, a personal enemy of Tertullian, affirmed (though this sounds more like Eusebius) that "Montanus and his crazy female prophetesses" were hung and that "Priscilla and Maximilia gave themselves up to debauchery,"[242] which is not at all surprising.

If we follow Runciman: "In the Sixth Century, the congregations of Montanists burned themselves alive in their churches rather than submit to the persecution of Justinian. In the Eighth Century, the remainder of the sect perished in a similar holocaust."[243]

Reduced to the state of a marginal sect by 331, christened "Phrygian heresy," "Montanism," even "Pepuzism" (by Basilides, Epiphanius, the codex of Theodose, and Augustin of Hippone, who borrowed it from Epiphane), the New Prophecy formed the foundations [*assises*] of Greco-Roman Christianity. It is ironic that the New Prophecy's extreme masochism furnished the history of the Church with a good part of its official martyrology.

The Catholics appropriated Blandine and his companions from Lyon. The *Acts* that exalted the punishment of the faithful, who were thus assured of an eternal felicity, fell under the heading of Montanist propaganda. In the Third Century, two works achieved a remarkable popular success: *The Martyrdom of Montanus and Lucius* and *The Marytrdom of Perpetue and Felicity.* They took the form of letters to the Church of Carthage (Montanist) that recounted the punishment of two virgins put to death in 203, under Septime Severe, who prohibited all proselytism among Jews and Christians.

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[241] *Ibid.,* p. 293.

[242] Apollonios of Ephesus, quoted in Eusebius of Cesarea, *Ecclesiatic History.*

[243] Runciman, *Le Manicheisme medieval,* p. 23.

The martyrdom of the Montanist Perpetue inspired a vision, which was attributed to him and which was supposed to harden the convictions of future victims. In it, the author evokes a *refrigerium,* a place of preservation in which the martyr, refreshed and washed of his wounds, waits for the dawn of his glory and sometimes manifests himself to the living to exhort them to religious duty. The *refrigerium* — in which the punished, endowed with a new body, prepares to shine on the side of the God thanks to an imminent ascension — would much later give birth to [the idea of] purgatory.

It is more than probable that, in their first versions, the *Acts* of Andrew, Pilate, Paul and Thecla, Peter and [the other] apostles emanated from the "propaganda services" of the New Prophecy. Many would be submitted to revisions in an easily calculated manner.

* * *

Prophetism, which was little valued by the clergymen who aspired to exercise their priesthood with the benediction of the State, risked lending itself to unfortunate abuse. The prophet arrogated to himself the right to change the Law and the laws, since God had spoken through his mouth.

If one can believe Epiphanius of Salamis's *Panarion* (II, 1, 18), Montan['s Jesus] proclaimed: "I am neither an angel nor a messenger, I am the Lord, the all-powerful God, present before you in the form of a man." Montan clealy marked the rupture with the conception of a Messiah who had been, until then, anticipated as the *angelos-christos,* the messenger-angel of God. (Between his two "Marys," Montan concretized in human form the personage of Jesus, who had until then been abstract, a secret and sacred name, an angel descended from the heavens and resuscitating, in the beyond, the time that assures the salvation of all through his sacrifice.)

The remark [attributed to Montan], which disavows Judeo-Christianity and Marcionism, implies the human character of Jesus and his nature as a divine being, a spirit capable of reincarnating himself in other prophets.

Tertullian was not deceived: it is man, possessed by the spirit, who can pardon, not the Church: "The Church will no doubt accord pardons for sins, but the Church as the Spirit, through a spiritual man, not the Church as the ensemble of bishops" (*De pudicitia,* 21, 17). This was competition that the Church could not tolerate. The Church would endeavour to unite in itself the [scattered] temporality of the Son and the incarnation of the spirit that spoke through the Church's voice, proferring truths — orthodoxies — and condemning prophets to death from the Ninth to the Seventeenth Centuries.

Nevertheless, the New Prophecy contented itself with following, to the letter, the Apostle, the only apostle from the Second Century (in 220, Tertullian still did not know an authority other than Paul). And the first *Epistle to the Corinthians* prescribes prophecy without any circumlocations: "He who prophesizes edifies the assembly […] I prefer that you prophesize. He who prophesizes is superior to he who speaks in tongues."

The New Prophecy would accord to whomever speaks by the Spirit "full power to renew traditional eschatological conceptions from top to bottom."[244]

Prophecy entered into the practices of the majority of Christian communities. It was prescribed by the *Didache.* It would reappear in the Seventeeth Century in Pietist sects, which willingly identified themselves with primitive Christianity. Priscilla, practicing esctasy, did not fail to foreshadow Machtilde of Magdebourg, Beatrice of Nazareth, Hadewijch of Antwerp and Theresa of Avila, when she affirmed that the Christ had visited her and slept near her, at Pepuza, taking the form of fire and penetrating her with his wisdom.

[244] Aland, *Augustin und der Montanismus,* 1960, p. 132.

Millenarianism, the imminence of the end of time, and the instauration of the kingdom of God on earth were also attached to the New Prophecy. Tertullian of Carthage and Irenaeus of Lyon showed themselves to be its ardent defenders. Montan was the Holy Spirit descended to the earth. "Maxilmilia was the last prophetess, after whom one must only wait for the end of the world."[245]

In each millenarianism, the same scenario was reproduced: "The New Jerusalem will descend from the heavens to Pepuza. The Montanists received exceptional promises that would be realized at the End of Days. Due to the impending end, ethical demands provided an exceptionally acute relief."[246]

For Tertullian, avoiding martyrdom was clinging to a world condemned to impending destruction. "Do not desire to die in your bed or in the langors of fever," he wrote in *De fuga,* "but rather in martyrdom, so as to glorify he who suffered for you."

In sum, do not the punishments inflicted by the mob or by justice fence in with good logic an existence of which asceticism prescribed the removal of all the pleasantness?

Tertullian, an adept and philosopher of the new current, laid the foundations of a new Christian morality, with which Catholicism compromised; Calvinism and Protestantism in general would be bent on promoting it. Respectful of the orders of abstinence extolled by its adversary, Marcion, the New Prophecy nevertheless gave a completely different meaning to its asceticism. The Marcionites and the supporters of [the idea of] a bad world created by the crazy God refused pleasure, procreation, and food that wasn't frugal, so as to not ratify a work that they denigrated. The Christians of the New Prophecy rejected neither the world nor the flesh, they only wanted to purify them and purify themselves, with the result that the Spirit would descend to and reside upon the earth without the hindrances of materiality.

Long fasts recused the faithful from the pleasures of terrestrial nourishment and exalted spiritual communion. The refusal of amorous relations did not pursue a will to extinguish the race of men, as did the Gnostics who were "beyond the world," but proscribed pleasure by husbanding the coitus of procreation in the manner of the Essenes. "It is no longer permitted, once a Christian, to contract a second marriage; only the contract and the dowry are able to differentiate adultery from fornication" (Tertullian, *De pudicitia*). The hatred of women (*) shared by Tertullian, Epiphanius, Augustin and the master thinkers of the Church was accompanied by the cult of virginity. The idea of Mary, virgin and mother of the Christ, certainly drew from the legends of Montanist propaganda.

(*) "The relations of man and woman are the works of pigs and dogs" (*Elenchos*). Tertullian: "Woman, you are the door of the Devil. It was you who persuaded he whom the Devil did not dare to attack directly. It was because of you that the Son of God had to die: you must always go about dressed in mourning and in rags and tatters."

Montanism also preached (for the first time in the history of the Christianity) the resurrection of the body, which Saul/Paul had so curiously borrowed from the Pharisians. In his *De resurrectio carnis,* Tertullian says "Of those who deny the resurrection of the flesh, the prophetess Prisca said: they are flesh and they hate the flesh." By dying, the martrys exchanged their torn bodies for bodies of glory that would enter into the divine cohort of saints, a veritable celestial Church.

Although virginal and penetrated by the Spirit, the prophetesses of Montan aroused the reprobation of many community leaders. Tertullian was happy to celebrate their chastity in *De exhortatione castitatis*; the author of the *Elenchos* (around 230) reproached the new Christians for "letting themselves be guided by little girls [*femmelettes*]"; and Origen, who would nevertheless push abnegation to [the

[245]Epiphanius, *Panarion,* 48, 2, 4.
[246]Aland, *op. cit.,* p. 126.

point of] self-castration, referred them back to the Apostle Paul (*) who constituted their supreme authority this polymorphous Paul, directed against Marcion, his inventor, and now against the anti-Marcionites: "Women, the Apostle said, must keep quiet in the ecclesiastical communities. Here is a prescription that the disciples of the women, those who let themselves be instructed by Priscilla and Maximilia, have not obeyed."

(*) Priscilla held the *Epistle to the Laodiceans,* a text from 160 or 170 that was originally Marcionite and placed under the name of Paul, to be authentic.

The New Prophecy And The Christian Philosophers Of The Second Century

The New Prophecy threw into the pond of the many Christian Gnosticisms the paving stone of faith. *Pistis,* which excited the exalted crowds to punishment and a fervent conviction that polytheism knew nothing about, exercised on Greco-Roman mindsets a kind of fascination that Judaism previously exercised and that xenophobia forbade since the last war of the Jews.

A "true" Christianity swept the theological arguments from the Gnostic systems. The fabrication of texts redesigned the personage of the Christ Jesus with the realism of everyday existence. This creation drove speculations about the *angelos-christos* to a secondary plane and mocked the intellectual Christians who had been diverted from the Jews and their Scriptures so as to participate in Greek mythology and Platonic scholasticism.

Justin the Apologist, Irenaeus of Lyon, the authors of the *Pastor,* and Tertullian launched a philosophical offensive — which was implicitly supported by the army of the Christ, which scorned death in the name of the Living Spirit — against "so-called gnosis" (the phrase is from Irenaeus).

Justin The Apologist

Although his death [roughly] coincided with the birth of the New Prochecy, Justin belonged to Hellenized and anti-Marcionite Christianity: the search for martyrs; the recuperation of the Jewish Scriptures; the care taken to invite the State to recognize this religion, purged of its Semitism, which was odious to the Greeks and Romans; and a Church of which the pacifist and non-violent ideal did not contravene public order.

Born around 100 in Flavia Neapolis, in Samaria, Justin was initiated into philosphy and, in particular, Plato and Stoicism. He founded a school at which he taught a Christianity that had broken with Essene Judaism without rejecting the texts of the Scriptures.

Drafted around 135, after the defeat of Bar Kochba and in the wave of anti-Semitic hysteria that followed it, Justin's *Dialogue with the Jew Tryphon* affirmed that — the Christians having freed a truth from the Scriptures that the Jews no longer understood — the Bible by all rights belonged to the Churches of the Christ. (At the same time, a *Diatribe against the Jews* by Apollonios Molon and *On the Jews* by Philo of Byblos were circulating.)

If this Messiah was still related to the *angelos-christos* of Judeo-Christianity and Marcionism, Justin revoked Marcion's aggressive dualism. Justin's Good God confronted, not the Demiurge who had created the world, but the Adversary, the fallen angel, the bloody rebel raised against the Divine Order: Satan the temptor.

Justin's schools were celebrated in Asia Minor and Rome. He wrote a lampoon of Marcion that has been lost. Tatian, his disciple, would discover in the New Prophecy the application of Justin's lessons: follow the example of the Christ through purity of habit and self-sacrifice to the point of martyrdom.

Among the first [followers] of the new religion, Justin lay the bases for a politics of recognition by the central State (it is possible, in this sense, that the morbid extremism of the Montanists displeased him, as it was repugnant to Meliton of Sardinia, but it is also true that Tertullian, another apologist, found nothing embarrassing in it). Justin published an *Apology to the Roman Senate in Favor of the Christians.* Several years later, around 154, he reiterated [his points] in *Second Apology to Antonin the Pious in Favor of the Christians.* (These *Apologies* reflected the new political line of the Churches. A federation, with Rome at the head, could assure the State of a religion of change, a solution in which the New Prophecy was substituted for weakening polytheism and the solar cult of the Emperors. And so Quadratus of Athens wrote to Hadrian and Aristide, Justin wrote to Antonin [138–166], and Meliton of Sardinia and and Apollonaire of Hierapolis wrote to Marcus Aurelius [169–177]. Did not Athenagore of Athens [177–178] declare, in his *Petition in Favor of the Christians,* that "the Empire and Christianity have grown side by side. The prince has nothing to fear, but everything to gain with the conversion of the Empire"?)

In vain. The Greeks and Romans did not care to distinguish Christians from Jews, and Justin's friends from the rigmarole [*kyrielle*] of sects — Sethians, Cainites, Nazarenes, Elchasaites, Marcionites, Judeo-Christians, Valentinians and anti-Marcionites — all of whom justified a Messiah who had been crucified and resuscitated, and in whose name they had excluded as idolatries the other cults, which Rome, as a good State merchant, had freely tolerated.

Religious fanaticism appeared particularly odious to the Greeks and Romans. Their interests prescribed searching for it in Palestine. Did not *Deuteronomy* (17, 12) enjoin "he who gives in to pride and does not want to obey the authority of the priest who serves YHWH your God, nor the sentence of the judge, will die and thus you will extirpate the evil from Israel"?

Therefore, what did Justin ask of the Emperor? The help of the State against those who scoffed at the Holy Spirit — by which one can understand the partisans of Simon of Samaria and all those who allowed his partisans to assimilate. Ammien Marcellin wrote about the Second Century what he had established in the Fourth: "The wildest animals are to be feared less than the Christians."[247]

Intolerance: such was still the reproach that Celse in his *True Discourse* (178–180) addressed to the Jews and Christians (indifferent to him), the sectarians of the crucified Serpent, the God with the head of a donkey (Seth) and a magician named Jesus.

The palms of the martyr, by which Justin found himself encumbered, were necessary to his fanaticism and the taste for death celebrated by Tertullian and the Christians of the New Prophecy. At the time, there was a bad quarrel between Justin and the cynical philosopher Crescentius, who challenged him to take the scorn for existence to its logical end. The conflict became inflamed, a trial ensued. Crescentius found an ally in the prefect Junnius Rusticus, a Stoic philosopher who had initiated Marcus Aurelius into the doctrine of Epictete. The polemic ended dramatically with the decapitation of Justin in 165.

A dialogue, which has been preserved, plays on the meanings of "gnosis" — science, learning, knowledge.

> Rusticus: "You who know (who have knowledge, learning), how can you imagine that if I decapitate you, you will resuscitate and rise to the heavens?"

[247] Ammien Marcellin, quoted in Rougier, *Celse contre les chretiens,* Paris, 1977, p. 13.

Justin: "I do not imagine it, but I know it from a definite science."

In his pamphlet *Sects on Auction,* Lucien of Samosate, a contemporary of Justin, disdained to cite the Christians. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that, in an extract from *The Death of Peregrinus,* quoted by Rougier in his *Celse against the Christians,* the author had the Christians of the New Prophecy in mind when he pointed out, ironically: "The unfortunate imagine that they are immortal and that they will live eternally. Consequently, they scorn the punishments and voluntarily surrender to death."[248]

Shunted by the solicitations of collective masochism, the crowds only devoted themselves more easily to the bloody excesses by which they exonerated themselves from repressions and set-backs. In these first instances, the victims did not succumb to the legal persecutions begun by Antonin the Pious or Marcus Aurelius. The former's twenty-three years' of rule count among the least bloody in Roman history and are preserved in memory by the *suavitas morum,* the gentleness of the morals of the emperor. Despite an excusable repugnance for sanctified morbidity, Marcus Aurelius did not depart from the principle instituted by Trajan: not to seek out disciples of the Christ, but punish them uniquely if, denounced, they refuse obedience to the Emperor and the offerings of the traditional cults.

Hermas and *The Pastor*

In Rome, around the middle of the Second Century, under the name of *The Pastor,* there circulated a collection of texts collated in the manner of a novel, the author of which called himself Hermas. Held in great esteem by the Christians for three centuries, it would be excluded from the canon by Gelase's decree at the end of the Fifth Century.

A didactic work of Judeo-Christian inspiration, *The Pastor* presented itself as a revelation. (Its author referred to the apocalypse of *Eldat and Modat,* now lost). It contained five visions, the last of which was actually an apocalypse, twelve precepts and ten parables. The spirit, still close to the Essene *Manual of Discipline* and the *Writing from Damascus,* brought together Nazarenism and the New Prophecy-in-gestation, without succumbing to Marcionite influence. Dualism had nothing in common with the "two Gods." It referred to the two spirits of *The Rule of the Community*: "God, who created man, placed before him [man] two spirits so that (he would be) guided by them until the moment of the visit: these were the spirits of truth and iniquity."

An embarrassment to the Catholic Church, *The Pastor* presented a Christian panorama that was completely different from the fantastic survey of the official history.

Hermas not only knew nothing of a historical Jesus, but didn't even know the name. He knew nothing of Mary, Joseph, Pilate and their associates.

"The visions name the Son of God once, in a formula: 'The Lord has sworn it by his Son,' which doubles another one: 'The Master has sworn it by his glory' (6, 8, 4), which is suspect as a result."[249]

The Son of God is the Spirit, the Great Archangel, sometimes named Michael.

Though Hermas and his nobodies resided in Rome, they had never heard of (and for good reason) the canonical gospels, nor of Matthew, Luke, Mark nor John. Hermas' only references are to the Bible, the one Marcion called the Old Testament. If *The Pastor* speaks of apostles, it refers to itinerant missionaries who propagated the Christian doctrine: the book distinguishes them from the *didaskaloi,*

[248]Rougier, *Celse contre les chretiens,* p. 13.

[249]P. Giet, "Un courant judeo-chretien a Rome au milieu du IIe siecle," in *Aspects du judeo-christianisme,* Paris, 1965.

those who taught (this was the era of the *Didache,* which was inspired by the *Epistle attributed to Barnabas*).

In 150, Hermas had no knowledge of a monarchal episcopacy, *a fortiori* an "Ancient Pope," who according to the historians reigned over the Church's destiny. "Presbyterians and Episcopalians are synomynous for him."[250] Indeed, he denounced the ambitious caste of the priests, to whom he compared apocathary poisoners in a *Vision* and venomous reptiles in *The Ninth Similitude.*

As in Essenism and Pharisian practice, the Church identified itself with a community charged with protecting widows, orphans, and the poor. It appeared to itself as an old woman, and it appealed to the purification of the faithful for their rejuvenation.

Purity of habit and the necessity of penitence, which washed the soul of its sin, constituted the central articulation of Hermas' Christian doctrine. The old Essene tradition married the movement of the New Prophecy at the moment of its birth.

Chastity was exalted in a scene that prefigured the adventures of Parsifal: Hermas resists the temptation of women, who cajole and solicit his love. Good for him, because — having triumphed over the test — it was revealed to him that, under the appearance of seductresses, were hiding "virginal natures." And "these virgins, who were they? They were holy spirits." Thus the martyred virgins of the New Prophecy acceded to their reality as saints, clothed, beyond the pangs of death, in resplendent bodies, haloed by virtue, which — through a pleasing return — the Italian painters, combing the hair of their mistresses in ecstasy, would render with their native sensuality. (The Madonnas of Filippo Lippi, one knows, represent the pretty nun whom he seduced and who abandoned the God of her convent to be with him, the revelation of which haloed her.)

In accord with the future rigor of Tertullian and the new Christianity, Hermas rebelled against those who judged the sins of the flesh to be of little importance. Nevertheless, his asceticism was opposed to the spirit of Marcion and his doctrine of the two Gods: "Believe that there is only one God […] Thus believe in him and fear him, and through this fear be continent." Faith (*pistis*) had the upper hand over *gnosis,* knowledge. On the other hand, if there existed a possibility of salvation through [good] works, through good acts, in no case did Hermas refer to redemption accomplished through Jesus. In addition, the questions of penitence and redemption were settled by the sinner and God, without the intervention of the priest. The faithful is he who, living in fear of displeasing the God of Goodness, bans terrestrial pleasures and nourishments from his existence: "He also commits adultery who lives like the non-believers (*tois ethnesin*)." Calvin would not speak in any other fashion.

Irenaeus Of Lyon

Around 180, Irenaeus, the bishop of a Christian community in Lyon, wrote a work against other Christians — principally the Marcionites and Valentinians — in which he attacked *gnosis* and salvation through knowledge. He related the entirety of these doctrines back to a unique source: the radicality of Simon of Samaria.

His essay corresponded to the rejection by Christians of the New Prophecy of philosophical elitism, esotericism, nay, magical practices that were communicated in the name of the Messiah by a cultural class that was opposed to the faith of the simple believers, who in their turn were little interested in speculative quibbles and obeyed an austere existence and a constant aspiration for martyrdom as to to assure their posthumous felicity.

[250] R. Joly, *Introduction au Pasteur d'Hermas,* Paris, 1968, p. 41.

Three years later in Lyon and Vienna, a pogrom put to death the new Christians during a massacre of the Jews; the Marcionite, Valentinian and Marcosian Gnostics escaped, in all probability due to their dealings with the well-to-do classes (the "dames of the purple-bordered robes," disciples of Marcos).

In Irenaeus' care to purge the churches of the extreme influence that anti-Semitism accorded to Greek philosophy, he wrote — not *Against the Heresies,* which was originally a Latin and later work, which suggests that the author spoke in the name of a Catholic Church and a well-established orthodoxy — but *Light Upon and Refutation of So-Called Gnosis.*

To the abstract developments of the Gnostics, the polemical conventions of which he often reported in the form of a tissue of absurdities, Irenaeus opposed blind faith, the *pistis* of the simple people who followed the law of the Christ without asking any questions. He had this (already Pascalian) profession of faith, which would inspire the "Happy are the poor of spirit" that the authors of the Gospels loaned to Jesus: "It is better, it is more useful, to be ignorant and know little, and to resemble God through charity, than it is to appear learned and know much by committing blasphemy against he who they call Demiurge."[251]

Irenaeus had two good reasons to attack Marcion and Gnosticism. The partisan of a politics of Church unification, resolved to confer the supreme authority to a Roman bishop, he perceived the antithetical character of ecclesiastical monarchism and the belief in two Gods, one ungraspable, the other despicable.

In the second place, Irenaeus was the author of an *Epideixis,* in which the Christian doctrine was explicated by the prophetic texts of the Bible, the same one that Marcion took exception to for its immorality and incoherence.

Irenaeus' love for the prophetic tradition reconciled him with the Christianity of the New Prophecy and the Christ who was [re]incarnated in Phrygia, and thus aroused a wave of conversions everywhere in the Empire. For the endorsement of such a hypothesis, it is fitting to recall that Tertullian mentioned a bishop of Rome who was a partisan of the Montanist current and one knows that Irenaeus intervened in favor of the new faith at the side of Eleuthere, a bishop of one of the churches of Rome between 170 and 190.

Annexed by Catholicism due to his hostility to *gnosis* and his defense of the monarchal principle in the Church, Irenaeus suffered the fate of Origen, who was revised and corrected by Rufin[us]. The *Epideixis* disappeared. Irenaeus' millenarianism, which was shared by Hermas and the New Prophecy, was eradicated from his work. The discovery of a manuscript in the Nineteenth Century was necessary to rehabilitate this bishop, who was sanctified by the Church at the cost of several censures due to his millenarianist "heresy."

The work of Irenaeus was recopied, revised, stuffed full of interpolations and citations of canonical gospels (while Tertullian, who was particularly erudite, knew no other gospel than the "Good Word" of Paul). Of the original text of the *Refutation,* there only remains Greek fragments of citations taken from the author of the *Elenchos* and from notorious forgers: Eusebius of Cesarea, Epiphanius of Salamis and Theodoret of Cyrus.

Tertullian, Philosopher Of The New Prophecy

Born around 160 in Carthage and issued from the aristocracy, Tertullian had a classical education. Breaking with rhetoric and philosophy, he devoted himself to dissipation in his youth, only to sud-

[251] Quoted by Rougier, *op. cit.,* p. 14.

denly renounce it, perhaps around 190, and converted to Christianity, which for the first time was massively propagating itself.

"We only got here yesterday," Tertullian wrote in 197, "and already we have filled the earth and everything that is in it thanks to you: the towns, the islands, the fortified posts, the municipalities, the villages, the camps themselves, the tribes, the ten families, the palace, the senate, the forum; we have only left your temples."[252]

While persecutions most often took the form of pogroms — although Tertullian took care to separate the wheat from the chaff in his *Adversus Judeos* — the pro-consul Vigellius Saturninus decapitated 18 Romanized Africans and Christians in the small town of Scili in 180.

Tertullian was inflamed by the New Prophecy. "I was blind, deprived of the light of the Lord," he moaned, "only having nature for a guide."[253] This was why he was in the world: "to weep (his) faults in the austerity of penitence."[254]

Tertullian's militant asceticism rejected the "visionary poets who ascribe to the gods the vices and passions of men," the philosophers who become "patriarchs of heresies."[255] He admired Justin, Tatian, Theophile of Antioch and Irenaeus, whom he imitated in a series of polemics against Marcion and the Valentinians.

The New Prophecy professed a frenzied asceticism, though different from that of Marcion, for whom sought-after pleasure was a concession to the bad work of the Demiurge. "The God of Marcion," Tertullian would write in his *Adversus Marcionem,* "by reproving marriage as bad and blemished by indecency, acted to the detriment of chastity, the interests of which he had the appearance of defending." If women had some importance in Montanist revelation — to the point that the author of the *Elenchos* would mock "their respect for the ramblings [*devagations*] of the little women who endoctrinate them" — , this was at the cost of a loudly claimed chastity, the status of inviolable virginity (the martyrs preferred death to defloration). A spiritual movement *par excellence,* founded on the repression of desire, it responded to the objurgations of Tertullian: "By economizing on flesh, you will acquire the Spirit" (*De exhortatione castitatis*).

Tertullian extolled martyrdom (*) ("Blood is the seed of the Christians"), condemned second marriages (in a polemic against the Carthaginian painter Hermogene, who defended the eternity of matter, Tertullian reproached him for being married several times), appealed to continence, and scorned women and the pleasures of love.

(*) The doctrine that provoked hysterical adhesion to Montanism, and provoked its reflux and its growing discredit, was the taste for martyrdom. Did not Tertullian proclaim, in his *De fuga,* "do not desire to die in your bed, in the langors of a fever, but as a martyr, so that he who suffered for you is glorified"?

Associating richness with lust and debauchery, the New Prophecy directly attacked a part of the clergy, which subsisted on tithes from the faithful and painlessly acclimated themselves to the duties of faith and the compromises of wordly representation. This is why Tertullian and the author of the *Elenchos* blamed Callixte, one of the principal bishops of Rome (whose name would be given to the catacombs as a whole), whom they reproached for his laxity.

The Church would not lack arguments for condemning Tertullian. But the importance of his apologetic works would incite Catholicism to set him aside using other methods. His biographers insinuated

[252]Tertullian, *Apologetique,* 37, 4.
[253]ID., *De poenitentia,* I, 1.
[254]*Ibid.,* 4.
[255]ID, *De anima.*

that he only adopted Montanist views rather late, that he was under the hold of Gatism, which unfortunately the vigor of his thought and style did not accredit. A lampoon of the heresies would even be attributed to him: one in which anti-Gnosticism was placed next to critiques of Montanism!

Chapter 16: Tatian and the Fabrication of the New Testament

Born in Syria around 120, Tatian posthumously became one of the founders of the Church due to his extremism in matters of asceticism. Irenaeus attacked him because, "like Marcion and Satornil, he called marriage a corruption and debauchery. He maintained that Adam was not saved."[256]

Converted to Christianity, and a disciple of Justin in Rome, Tatian was exposed to the attacks of Crescentius, Justin's accuser. Teaching Christianity in Rome around 172–173, he professed the anti-Marcionism of his master and transmitted it to his disciple, Rhodon. Then he left for the East and founded schools while the New Prophecy took off. One supposes that he died at the end of that decade.

Tatian's single known work falls under the heading of the apologetic. His *Speech to the Greeks* opposed Christianity to Greek philosophy in general and the Stoics in particular. In it he developed ideas shared by Tertullian and the new popular current. His profession of monotheist faith contradicted accusations of dualism, which were often made about him by the Catholics. On the other hand, his idea of the Christ had not evolved since Justin: "The celestial Logos, spirit born from the Father and reason issued from the reasonable power — in imitation of the Father who engendered him — made man in the image of immortality, so that, to the extent incorruptibility is in God, man likewise participates in the lot of God and possesses immortality. But before forming man, the Logos created the angels."[257] The holy spirit is called the minister of God who suffered.

Tatian's essay *On Perfection, According to the Savior* is lost, but Clement of Alexandria picked out of it an absolute condemnation of marriage that surpasses the Montanist spirit. The Church profited by erecting Tatian as the leader of a phantom heresy called Encratism, in which were grouped together — thanks to the Church's Fourth Century struggle against the Donatists and the Circoncellions — the supporters of an excessive moral rigor.

No doubt there was another reason for the animosity of the Church towards Tatian. Deschner cites him as among the copyists who re-worked the letters of Paul and gave them a stylistic unity.[258]

The wave of popular Christianity engendered a general revival of the Jewish *midrashim,* translated somehow or other by the Judeo-Christians, and in need of being de-Judaized and explained rationally to the general public. Tatian has been credited with having harmonized (in addition to Paul's letters) the many propagandistic texts that were passed off as the gospel preached by the Apostle, because there was only one at the time.

Nevertheless, neither Irenaeus, Tertullian, nor Clement of Alexandria mentioned the *Diatessaron euaggelion,* which would remain until the Fifth Century the dogmatic work *par excellence* of the Syrian Christian churches before being replaced by the four gospels of the Catholic Church. A Greek fragment of 14 lines recovered at Dura-Europos dates from 230 at the latest. It proposes placing end

[256] Irenaeus, *Mise en lumiere et refutation,* I, 28, 1.
[257] Tatian, *Oratio,* VII.
[258] K. Deschner, III, p. 109.

to end the fragments of the gospels attributed to Mark, Luke and Matthew. Is this the *Diatessaron* and, if so, is it that of Tatian? How come Tertullian, an admirer of Tatian, does not mention it? As far as the fragments by Irenaeus, they have been altered too much to offer a serious testimony concerning the canonical gospels in the Second Century.[259]

The Canonical Gospels

What aspect did Christianity present at the end of the Second Century? Although the Greeks and Romans did not distinguish it from Judaism and confused the sectarians of Jesus, the Sethians, the Naassenes, the Barbelites and other messianists, the New Prophecy implanted in the urban milieu a popular Christianity that attracted slaves, a fraction of the plebes and the petite bourgeois (thus a fringe of the aristocracy, as well), until then rather receptive to Gnostic doctrines and philosophical Chrisianity.

If the importance accorded to faith, to life according to the Christ, to asceticism, to the refusal of riches and to the vocation of martyrdom reduced Gnosticism to a marginal existence, which Christianity would nevertheless exploit in the genesis of its theology, Gnosticism was embraced by a good number of bishops and heads of communities who, since Trajan's conventions (renewed by Hadrian), had been integrated into public life and, careful to avoid all scandal, already carried themselves as if they were future ecclesiastical bureaucrats of the triumphant Church. The ardor and fanaticism of the poor Christians embarrassed the lax bishops of the Second Century. They would form the proto-Catholic current or, more exactly, would be chosen in the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Centuries as the representatives of a back-dated orthodoxy.

Ecclesiastical reticenceincreased the number of *lapsi,* supplemented by the persecutions of the Third Century, whereas Montanist intransigence was perpetuated among the partisans of Novatian and, much later, Donat.

The *midrashim* of the Elchasaite and Judeo-Christian Churches conferred a legitimacy to particular and often rival churches: the churches of Thomas, Simon-Peter, Jacob, Saul-Paul, Clement, Philippe, Matthias… The unity imposed by the great movement of the New Prophecy collated writings of diverse origins, translated several times from the Hebrew or Aramaic, which were revised and imitated. The unusual ensemble then gave birth to a Propaganda-literature adapted to the popular brushwork [*facture*] of the movement. Anti-Semitism, miraculous fables and the exaltation of poverty and sacrifice little by little composed a Jesus who was better conformed to the plebian mindset. The apostles, initially the witnesses of the Lord, whose mythical authority guaranteed such and such a community, thenceforth formed a cohort charged with propagating the Christian law that was substituted for Mosaic law.

The apostles erected as saints and martyrs served as models for the exaltation of the Christians of Carthage, Scili, Lyon, Vienna and Rome.

The *Acts* circulated, telling of the marvelous adventures, deaths and ascensions of Peter, Paul, Barnabas, Philippe, Andrew and Jacob, who were the heroes of a saga dominated by Joshua, cut from the same cloth as the Christians who caused scandals and perished for their faith.

[259]H.W. Hogg, "The *Diatessaron* of Tatian," in *Ante-Nicaean Fathers,* Grand Rapids, 1951–1956; M. Wittaker, *Oratio ad Graecos and Fragments,* Oxford, 1982.

Justin[260] and Tertullian[261] mentioned the *Acts of Pilate.* (Augmented in the Fifth Century by a description of hell, the *Acts* would in the Eighth Century form the *Gospel of Nicomede,* in which the legends of Joseph of Arimathea and the Grail appeared. The *Acts* was originally a Montanist or pre-Montanist text that had been excluded from the canon.) Held as a saint and martyr in Syria and Egypt, Pilate still belonged to a dramaturgy in which the *angelos-christos* entered into a brief terrestrial existence in a historical context.

The *Acts of Pilate* contain the materials that would serve, in the hands of copyists less exalted and more careful with historical probability, into the fabrication of the canonical Gospels: "It was the sixth hour; an obscurity covered the entire world until the ninth hour. The sun was obscured: the veil of the temple went from on high to down below, and cut it in two. Jesus cried in a loud voice: My Father, Abi, Adasch, Ephkidon, Adonai, Sabel, Louel, Eloei, Elemas, Ablakanei, Orioth, Mioth, Ouaoth, Soun, Perineth, Jothat."[262]

The names evoked by Jesus, which identified him with a magician or a thaumaturgist, corresponded to the Aeons of power that were figured upon the abraxas or talismans of magic rituals.[263]

Tertullian's recital in his *Apologetics* merits being quoted because, effacing thaumaturgical aspects, it constitued a more sober and yet very different version than that retained by the Catholic canon. The Christ was still the *angelos-christos,* but prey to a terrestrial drama that was perfectly understandable by the faithful who were headed towards punishment and a radiant celestial resurrection:

> Thus, what comes from God is God, the Son of God, and the two make only one. Thus the spirit that comes from the spirit and the God who comes from God are different in position [*la mesure*], he is second in rank, not in situation, and he came from his source without being detached from it.
>
> Thus, this ray of God, as he had always foretold, descended as a Virgin and, being incarnated in her womb, he was born man mixed with God. The flesh united with the spirit, nourished itself, grew, spoke, taught, worked — and here is the Christ. For the moment, accept this 'fable' (it is similar to yours), while waiting for me to show you how the Christ was tested and who were those who, in advance, circulated among you fables of this type, so as to destroy this truth.
>
> The Jews also knew that the Christ would come, because the prophets had spoken to them. And, indeed, even today, they await his coming, and between them and us there is no greater subject of contestation than their refusal to believe that he has already come.
>
> Because two ascensions of the Christs were announced: one that would be accomplished in the humility of the human condition; another that was expected at the end of the world [*siecle*], in the sublime splendor of the paternal power received and the divinity clearly manifested. Therefore, the Jews — not understanding the first — believe that the second was unique, and they hoped for it as it was clearly foretold.
>
> By their sin, the Jews have indeed merited being unable to understand the first one: they believed it, if they understood it and they had salvation, if they believed it. They them-

[260] Justin, *Apologie I,* 35, 9–48, 24.
[261] Tertullian, *Apologetique,* 21, 24.
[262] *Acta Pilatis,* translation by E. Revillont, Paris, 1912.
[263] Matte-Bonnes, R. and C. Bonner, *op. cit.*

selves say in the Scriptures that they have been deprived of wisdom, intelligence and the usage of their eyes and ears, as a punishment.

In their abasement, the Jews have thus concluded that he [Jesus] is only a man; and naturally, because of his power, they take him for a magician: actually they see him, according to his own word, chasing demons from the bodies of men, giving sight to the blind, purifying the lepers, straightening up the paralyzed, finally, making the dead come back to life, always according to his word, making the elements serve him, calming the tempests and walking on the waters, thus showing that he was [indeed] the Son previously announced by God, and born for the salvation of all, this Word of God, eternal, first-born, accompanied by his power and intelligence, having his spirit for support.

Hearing the preaching of his doctrines, which confused the doctors and notables among the Jews, who were exasperated, especially when they saw an immense multitude flocking to him: to the point that, finally, they delivered him to Pontius Pilate, who then governed Syria in the name of the Romans and, through the violence of their public approval [*leur suffrages*], they forced the pro-curator to surrender Jesus so as to put him on a cross. He himself had foretold that they would act thus; this would not have been much, had not the prophets also foretold it.

And yet, attached to the cross, he made many wonderful remarks about his death. Indeed, from himself he rendered his soul with his last words, foreseeing the service of the executioner; at the same moment, the day was deprived of the sun, at the moment that he marked the place of his orb. One certainly believes that this was an eclipse, and those who do not know that this wonder had also been foretold for the death of the Christ, not understanding the reason, deny it and yet you find this global accident set down in your archives.

The Jews, after having detached the body [from the cross] and after having deposited in it a sepulcher, surveilled it with great care, using a military guard: as he had foretold that he would rise from the dead on the third day, the Jews feared that his disciples, furtively removing the cadaver, would deceive their suspicions.

But on the third day, the earth suddenly trembled, the enormous rock placed on the sepulcher was set aside, the guard — struck by fright — dispersed, the disciples did not show themselves, and in the sepulcher one found nothing other than the corpse of a gravedigger.

Nevertheless, the Jewish notables, who had an interest in having people believe in a crime and in diverting people from their faith and thereby rendering them tributary and dependant upon the Jews, spread the rumor that he had been rescued by his disciples. Actually, he did not appear before the multitudes, so as to not uproot the impious from their error and so that faith, destined for a quite precise compensation, was costly to men.

But Jesus passed forty days with several disciples in Galilee, in the province of Judea, where he taught them what he had to teach them. And then, having trusted to them the mission of preaching throughout the whole earth and, enveloped in a cloud, he rose to heaven: an ascension quite a bit truer than the one your Proculus customarily attributes to Romulus.

> Pilate, who was himself already a Christian in his heart, announced all of these facts relative to the Christ to Tiberius, then Ceasar. (*) The Ceasars themselves would have believed in the Christ, if the Cesars were necessary to the world or if the Ceasars had been Christians as well as Ceasars.

(*) It is no doubt from the Christian legend of Pilate that the historical staging of the trial of Jesus the agitator was drawn. The events here come under the headings of cosmic dramaturgy and hierophany.

> As far as the disciples, scattered throughout the world, they obeyed the precepts of their divine Master; after seeing many suffer at the hands of Jewish persecutors, confident in the truth, they ended by spilling [*semer*] with joy their Christian blood in Rome, during the cruel persecutions of Nero.
>
> But we will show you irrecusable witnesses to the Christ, even among those whom you adore. It is a great point, which I can make to oblige you to believe the Christians, even those whom you hinder from believing the Christians.
>
> For the moment, here is the chronological history of our religion; here is, we declare, the origin of our sect and our name, with their author.
>
> One no longer reproaches us for any infamy, one does not imagine that there is something else, because it is not permitted for anyone to lie about his religion. Indeed, by saying that one adores another thing than what one [actually] adores, one denies what one adores and one transports one's homages to another [thing], and by transporting them, one no longer adores what one has repudiated.
>
> Therefore we say, and we say it publicly, and we cry it aloud when we are torn and blood-stained by your tortures: 'We adore God through the Christ.' Believe it, [he was] a man, if you like; it is through him that God wanted to be known and adored.
>
> To respond to the Jews, I would say that it was through Moses that they, too, learned to adore God; to the Greeks, I would say that Orpheus in Pierie, Musee in Athens, Melampus in Argos and Trophonius in Boetie bound men [to them] through initiations.[264]

At the same time that the Gnostic Gospels were being propagated, the persistence of an older Christianity — which one discovered at Nag-Hammadi and that consisted of fantastic recitals similar to those which Tertullian decanted for the use of the Greeks and Romans — gave to Jesus more and more of the traits of a historical personage similar to Apollonious of Tyane, not without recalling that he remained God in the same reality as his human nature. For the new Christian wave, Jesus was not a pure spirit. Such a belief, among others, grounds a passsage in the canonical *Gospel attributed to Luke* (24, 36–43).

In brief, these were the polemics and ideas of the Second Century, which — recuperating and explicating Jewish and Essene speculations about the Messiah — would end up, through additions and corrections, in the novels about Jesus, the Jesus who made people forget about Joshua (but tardily, because in 240 Origen still emphasized the omnipresence of the soldier of Moses).

Upon all those who glimpsed in the growing power of Christianity the perspective of an ascension to power, the necessity imposed itself of ordering and harmonizing the acts, letters, apocalypses and gospels that were as great in number as the rival communities.

[264]Tertullian, *Apologetique,* XXI, p. 8 *sq.*

It was the epoch in which Celse, in his *True Discourse* (around 180), mocked the multitude of Christian prophets, their rivalries, their lack of scruples in fabricating texts and in revising the old ones several times. (Tertullian showed where the shoe pinched when he wrote with some irritation: "One does not say that we forge our materials ourselves.") Each church placed its gospel or sacred text under the name of a "founding father" or an apostle.

The majority of them are unknown. Nevertheless, one cites Tatian and a certain Leucius Charinus. Tertullian attributed the *Acts of Paul,* in which a recital of his martyrdom and the love that carried him to the young Thecla, to the zeal of an Eastern priest who dedicated a true cult to the Apostle (the text would enjoy a great popular success in its Greek, Latin, Coptic, Syrian, Armenian, Slavic and Arabic versions). The *Acts of Paul* participated in the Montanist fervor, in the same way that the *Gospel attributed to Barthelemy,* in which Jesus says, as if addressing Montan: "salvation to you, my twin, second Christ."

On the other hand, the *Ascension of Jacob,* of Elchasaite origin, took to Paul warmly.

The misinterpretation of the Hebrew and Aramaic texts engendered, in the course of the cascading translations, incoherencies and bizarre aspects that were all the more perceptible in the apocryphal and canonical Gospels, which subscribed to the Hebrew mythologies through loaned words.

The *Epistula apostolorum,* probably issued from Asia Minor or Egypt in the second half of the Second Century, appeared as a syncretic attempt that insisted on the miracles and resurrection of Jesus. An apocalypse inscribed itself in the millenarianist preoccupations of Montanism: in the *Epistula,* Jesus responds to questions about the dates of the *parousia* and the resurrection. In it there are elements shared with the *Gospel attributed to John,* the *Apocalypse of Peter,* the *Epistle of Barnabas,* and Hermas' *The Pastor.* In the same spirit, but without millenarianist allusion, the *Acts of the Apostles,* retained as canonical, reconciles the rival views of Paul and Simon-Peter in a historical novel. It corrects the *Epistula,* which, in the Montanist line, blamed the bishops and the priests accused of having misled the people of God, after having made apology for "Saul, who wants to be called Paul."[265]

* * *

Ninety-four texts of Christian propaganda were thus spread from the Second Century to the Ninth Century. Twenty-seven of them would be retained in the formation of the neo-testamentary corpus and would define the Catholic Holy Scrptures. These "gospels truths" proceeded from a *melting pot* [English in original] in which there was a battle between the various armies of copyists who remodeled and sharpened second- and third-hand materials with adjustments that were demanded by the polemics of the time (*) so as to end up with a dogmatic corpus that the imperial, pontifical and inquisitorial instances would place beyond contestation. The argument from authority remained efficacious, if one judges from the pusillanimity with which the historians of today approach the question. Therefore, with the exception of several phrases from Pauline letters, all of the texts of the New Testament are fakes — historical falsifications that covered for struggles, quite real, that took place over many epochs — of the same nature as the *Letters of the Jews sent to the Lapis Lazuli Brothers at the time of Jesus,* in which Jews from the year 30 congratulated themselves for crucifying the Messiah. (These *Letters* procured for the inhabitants of Ulm in 1348 excellent reasons for putting an end to the "Jewry" of the city.[266])

[265]E. Junod, "Creation romanesque et tradition ecclesiatique dans les Acts apocryphes des apotres," in H. Koester and F. Bovon, *Genese de l'ecriture chretienne,* 1991.

[266]Erbetta, *Gli apocrifi, op. cit.,* p. 139.

(*) Celse: "It is notorious that many among them [...] have revised the primitive text of the Gospels, three or four times, and still more, so as to refute what they object to."

Nevertheless, no one is unaware that the manuscript called *Sinaiticus,* which contains important fragments of the gospels later chosen as canonical, belonged to a lot of 50 manuscripts that Eusebius of Cesarea, the flatterer of Constantine, had transcribed around 331 under the orders of the Emperor, who desired to autocratically unify the emerging Catholic tradition by distributing copies to the principal churches of the Empire. They were modified even further, as Abbey Bergier emphasizes in his *Dictionary of Theology*: "Men truly knowledgeable in matters of exegesis, and especially sincere, recognize that the text of the New Testament was not set before the end of the Sixth Century."

Jesus had been an angel-messiah, then an agitator put to death despite the Christian Pontius Pilate and because of the Jews. From the exoteric brushwork, assured by Montanism, a Jesus — God and man, as in the doctrines of Tertullian — freed himself; and then anti-Montanist reaction seized him so as to remodel him.

Catholicism issued from the victory and the vengeance of the *lapsi,* the priests who, through fear of punishment, abjured during the successive persecutions of the Third Century. To the Montanist principles of Novatian and, later, Donat, these priests opposed a conciliatory Jesus, less intransigent, less penetrated by asceticism than the messiah of Tertullian, Clement and Origen.

The critique of sources, which did not start until the end of the Twentieth Century (and then timidly), shows the diverse degrees of transformation of the biblical Joshua into Jesus of Nazareth.

When a community or church showed the need to affirm its cohesion, it gave itself rules that founded it on an older authority. It thus borrowed from the Bible or the *midrashim* remarks (*logia*) that it attributed to the Lord, spiritual master of the faithful, much later identified with Joshua/Jesus.

"The statement, 'There is more happiness in giving than in receiving,' presented by the *Acts of the Apostles* (20, 35) as a *logion* of Jesus, is in fact originally a Jewish maxim. One also finds it in the *Didache* (1, 5), but it isn't certain that this text recognizes the status of the word of the Lord [...] The Church adopted the Jewish precepts by adapting them to its needs and transformed them into the *logia* of Jesus."[267]

By Hellenizing themselves, the Christianities of the Second Century also referred to Greek fables and philosophical precepts.

Also inspired by the "wisdom" of Solomon and Jesus, son of Sira, the *logia* inscribed themselves in the perspective of Gnostic Christianity. Jerome, citing a *logion* from the *Gospels of the Hebrews* in his *In prophetem Ezechielem commentarius,* writes, "Whoever has saddened the spirit of his brother is guilty of the greatest crime," which was in fact a banal moral commandment that he placed into the mouth of Jesus. Therefore, the remark participated in Gnosticism, as a passage from Hermas makes clear: sadness is a vice because it chases away the Holy Spirit, who inhabits the human soul. The spirit of the brother is not the *animus,* but the *pneuma.*

"One can find other theological reasons that lead to the transformation of ancient words [*paroles*] and the elaboration of new *logia*: for example, on the occasion of the controversy that took place with respect to the renewal of the pardon accorded to the sinners after their conversion to Christianity (...) Arguments that are based on the content of a *logion* can acquire more weight."[268]

In fact, the great controversy was born from the rigor and intransigence of the New Prophecy. It was against the New Prophecy that the redactors of the gospels placed under the names of Matthew

[267] H. Koester and F. Bovon, *op. cit.,* p. 36.
[268] *Ibid.,* p. 43.

and Luke attributed these remarks to Jesus: "If seven times a day your brother offends you and seven times he returns to you to say, 'I repent,' you will pardon him" (*Gospel attributed to Luke,* 17, 4); as well as this staging, which insists on pardoning the apostate priests contrary to the opinion of Novatian or Donat: "Then Peter approached and said to him, 'Lord, when my brother commits an offense where I am concerned, how many times should I pardon him? Seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you seven times, but 77 times seven times'" (*Gospel attributed to Matthew,* 18, 21–22).[269]

The popular expansion of Christianity in the Greco-Roman Empire, under the influence [*l'impulsion*] of Montan and Tertullian, ended in the anecdotal translation of the Gnostic specualtions, in the apologue and the staging of the *logia.* With the New Prophecy, a certain imagery — which the Catholic Church, contrary to Protestant reticence, had always encouraged among the "simple of spirit" — was propagated.

A passage from the *Epistle attributed to Barnabas* shows the origin of the sponge of vinegar presented to Jesus on the cross:

> *The Epistle of Barnabas* testifies in another manner, quite simple, to the enunciation of the authority of the Lord's word. In two instances in this text, the citation of a *logion* of the Lord concludes an exegetical debate.
>
> In the first passage, the author asks, in the framework of a discussion on the meaning of the Jewish sacrificial rites (*Epistle of Barnabas,* 7, 11): 'And why does one put the wool in place of the thorns? It is a prefiguration of Jesus proposed to the Church: the thorns are frightening; he who wants to take away the scarlet wool must suffer a great deal to render himself master of the test.' And to continue, in the style of the *logia* of Jesus formulated in the first person, and making the expression follow the phrase 'he said': 'Thus those who want to see me and await my kingdom must seize me through ordeals and suffering.'
>
> As Barnabas gave a typological significance to the entirety of the rite, such a remark by Jesus can — departing from the Jewish model — be 'freed' without particular effort.
>
> Another passage (*Epistle of Barnabas,* 7, 4–5) offers a second example of this method: 'All the priests, but they alone, eat entrails not washed with vinegar. Why?' And Barnabas made the Lord intervene in person, to give a response to this question: 'Because you make me drink bile with vinegar, me, who would offer my flesh for the sins of my new people; you eat, only you, while the people fast and lament in the sack and ashes!'[270]

Thus the three gospels called synoptic were laboriously composed, harmonized somehow or other, and placed under the names of three unknowns: Mark, from whom came a secret gospel, which Harnack attributes to Marcion; Matthew, perhaps issued from a *Apocryphal Gospel attributed to Matthew,* which has disappeared; and Luke, a stylist, a professional writer like Leucius Charinus or Tatian. (It seems established by the *Gospel attributed to John* that, at the beginning, it was a Christian Gnostic text, if not also Naassene or Sethian. The oldest fragments — according to the book by I. Bel, *Christian Papyri,* London, 1935 — dates from the years 125–165.) The synoptic gospels would eclipse from their "unquestionable truth" a great number of "secret" gospels (*apocrypha* in Greek), to the point that the Church would impose on the word "apocryphal" the meaning "false, falsified."

[269] *Ibid.,* pp. 43 and 44.
[270] *Ibid.*

The writings discovered at Nag-Hammadi make no references to the synoptics, and the Jesus attested to by several texts is only the angel-messiah. But it would be important to the Church of the Fourth Century, in its struggle against Arius and Donat, to fix historically the personage of the Messiah Jesus, so that he no longer appeared as the "second Christ," like Montan, and that his divine nature was "consubstantially" mixed with the human nature of a prophet of whom the Church of Rome would erect itself as the universal legatee, through the filiation of the twelve apostles — and especially Paul, the Roman citizen, and Peter, the first "pope" of the Latin New Jerusalem.

Chapter 17: Three Local Christianities: Edessa and Bardesane, Alexandria and Origen, Antioch and Paul of Samosate

While the New Prophecy would, for the first time and despite the dissent of a minority of the bishops, concretize the project of a Christianity that wished to conquer the Greco-Roman Empire and ended up unifying the rival churches, there were three cities in which the oldest Judeo-Christian traditions guarded their particularities and perpetuated their privileges as ancient communities.

Such was the case with Edessa, Alexandria and Antioch, the fortresses of Esseno-Nazarenism.

Bardesane Of Edessa

Starting from the First Century, Edessa was a hub of Christian expansion.

"The structure of the archaic Christianity of Edessa," Drijvers writes, "shows the existence of varied groups with diverse opinions that fought against and complained about each other."[271]

Here, in the First Century, was implanted — at the same time that it agitated spirits in Alexandria, Antioch and Ephesus — a system of beliefs that issued from Essenism and engendered, on a foundation of local particularisms, churches that were obedient to their own laws and doctrines.

The communities or *ekklesia* of Edessa were placed — no doubt by the missionary activity of some disciple of Thomas — under the patronage of Jude or Thomas, mythically elected "witness" of the Lord.

Jude or Thomas' organization navigated in the [turbulent] current of the Second Century according to the *logia* attributed to Joshua/Jesus and supposedly compiled by Matthew or Thomas. The churches of Edessa perpetuated a Judeo-Christianity of the Elchasaite type, no doubt evolving towards anti-Semitism without, it seems, tipping over into Marcionism or Montanism.

In Edessa in 201, the first building designed for meetings of the believers and taking the name 'church' was constructed. It was destroyed shortly afterwards by a flood, the sign of a singular carelessness on the part of the tutelary God.[272]

Around 180, one of the churches, led by Bishop Palut, attempted to impose its authority on all Christians. His adepts called themselves "Palutians." The struggles for precedence among the diverse churches of Edessa would last until the Fifth Century: the Palutian faction assured themselves of power and, rallying to the theses of Nicaea, embraced Catholicism. Consequently, this faction would hasten to label as heretical the churches that had in the past shown hostility towards it.

Thus it would be the work of Bardesane or Bar Daysan, who offered an original example of one of the many syncretisms, the successive stratifications of which would compose the Christianity of the first four centuries.

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[271] H.J.W. Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa,* Leiden, 1980, p. 194.

[272] *Ibid.,* pp. 5 and 7.

Born in Edessa in 144 or 155, Bardesane belonged to the aristocracy and received a serious philosophical education before converting to the new religion in 180. (For a time, he adhered to the Valentinian school.) His vast learning also embraced astrology, ethnology and history. With his son Harmodius, he composed some 150 hymns honored by the Syrian churches.

His *Dialogue on Destiny* and *Book of the Laws of Nations,* from which his disciple Philippe compiled his teachings, did not escape the destruction ordered by the Church, although Eusebius did authorize the citation of a few extracts.[273]

When Caracalla dealt a mortal blow to the independance of Edessa in 216, Bardesane went into exile and went to Armenia, where, according to Moses of Chorene, he pursued historical research and worked for the propagation of Christianity. Thereafter his teachings accorded a growing place to the idea of liberty.

One can not exclude an encounter between Bardesane and an Indian ambassador sent by the Emperor Heliogabale around 218. One believes that he died in 222, leaving behind disciples and Christian communities that continued to exist until the Fifth Century.

Bardesane's philosophical Christianity situated itself at an equal distance from the New Prophecy, the ascetic rigor and fantastic masochism of which he took exception to, and from an ecclesiastical current that aimed to integrate itself as a recognized authority in the social order of Rome.

If he adapted the trinitarian conception — Father-Son and Pneuma-Spirit (Spirit), which would triumph at Nicaea — from the Valentinian Theodotus, Bardesane was opposed to Marcion and he rejected the Demiurgical creation. According to Bardesane, the world was the work of a Good God, because, despite its imperfections, salvation enters into mankind's possibilities. Thus it was incorrectly that Ephrem the Syrian denounced the influence of Bardesane on Mani, the founder of the Manichean religion. If the Bardesanites excluded from their canon the two epistles of Paul to the Corinthians, no doubt it was due to Marcionism, which presented versions anterior to the Catholic corrections.

Bardesane did not divide men into three classes, according to the common Gnostic opinion of the Second Century — hylics, psychics and pneumatics — but distinguished in each person three levels on the ladder of consciousness: the *soma,* the *psyche,* [and] the *pneuma.* Through the Christ, God gave the model of a gradual elevation that traces the road of salvation.

The Bardesanites obviously knew nothing of the canonical gospels, but referred to the *Acts of Thomas* and to the *logia* that composed the gospel attributed to the mythical apostle of Edessa.

Drijvers detects the influence of Philo of Alexandria, transmitted by the Jewish milieus, well implanted in Edessa.[274] The Essene and Judeo-Christian doctrine of the two roads, Light and Darkness, left traces in Bardesane's conception of liberty.

This proceeded from a spirit of divine origin, which, uniting with the soul, descended through the seven spheres of the planets (the Hebdomade) so as to implant itself in the human body at the moment of birth. The soul submits to the influence of planetary forces, which it must wheedle [*amadouer*] at the time of its future ascension, the hour of birth thus determining the course of existence and distributing fortune and misfortune.

In his goodness, God nevertheless permits man to escape from the ineluctable. United with the soul, the spirit arrogates for itself the privilege of influencing circumstances. Knowledge of the horoscope intervenes in salvation in a decisive manner. Adam made bad use of such a gift and did not autho-

[273]ID., *The Book of the Laws of Countries: Dialogue on the Faith of Bardesane of Edessa,* Assem, 1965. [*Trans*: note the small mistake: Vaneigem's text refers to the *Livre des lois des nations,* not *Livre des lois des pays.*]

[274]ID., *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa, op. cit.,* p. 222.

rize his soul to return to the place of its divine origin, which Bardesane called the "nuptial chamber of Light."[275] (The *Gospel attributed to Philippe,* from the same era, evokes the relations between redemption and *koinon,* "nuptial chamber," in which the union with the Plerome, the Divine Totality or Ogdoade, takes place. The soul, the spirit and the body give birth to a quite piquant anecdotal translation: "Three walk with the Lord at the same time: Mary, his mother, his sister and Madeleine, whom one calls his companion. Because Mary is his sister, mother and companion" [Section 32].)

The coming of the Christ — still conceived as *angelos-christos,* not as historical founder of a religion — unveiled to the soul the road of salvation, the manner of untangling obscurity and darkness so as to vanguish the determination of the planets and to assure the soul's final redemption. Here Bardesane expounded the theory of free will, battle-horse of the future Catholicism.

The envoy of God, Jesus filled no other mission than indicating, through the sacrifice of his flesh, the salvational road and the *gnosis* that taught one how to leave the obscure chaos of the body. Not an extreme asceticism, as required by the New Prophecy, but a sacrificial exercise that elevated the spirit and united it with the breath of the soul, which thereby obtained the power to vanquish the conjuration of the planetary injunctions and return to the light. He who identifies with the Christ modified the astrological laws and increased his power over the macrocosm. Such were the teachings of Bardesane. It is the thought of Simon of Samaria, inverted by its antiphysis and denatured by the Christic example. A thought that, if Christianized, did not remain any less unacceptable to ecclesiastical authority, since Bardesane entrusted the work of redemption in the hands of each person, without the help of any church.

Audi

If one believes Michael the Syrian, the Archdeacon Audi (or Audie) belonged to the Bardesanite communities at the end of the Third Century or the beginning of the Fourth. To support his legitimate authority, he produced apocalypses and the *Acts of the Apostles,* which the Constantinian Church — adopting the political line of the "Palutians" — would condemn as "apocryphal."

Gregoire Bar-Hebraeus, an Arab theologian from the Seventh Century, attributed to Audi ninety-four apocalypses or revelations. Underneath a scornful and anecdotal reduction that Bar-Hebraeus imposed on Audi's ideas, the Bardesanite doctrine of the descent and resurrection of the Spirit confronting the planetary Aeons shows through: "(Audi claimed) that the Christ descended to all of the firmaments and that their inhabitants did not know him, and that his body was celestial, and that it was injured by the lance, and that it was not injured, that it was hung from the wood and that it was not hung."[276]

Audi's conception was not essentially different from that of Arrius, the quarrel about whom — at the same time — irritated the emerging tyranny of the Catholic, apostolic and Roman Church. Audi would reject the decisions made in Nicaea. Exiled to Scythia, he would propagate his Christianity among the Goths.[277]

[275] *Ibid.,* p. 219.
[276] E. Junod and J.-D. Kaestli, *Histoire des Actes apocryphes des apotres,* p. 41.
[277] C. Puech, "Audianer," in *Reallexicon fuer Antike und Christentums,* 1950, pp. 910 *sq.*

Origen Of Alexandria

The fate reserved for Origen and his work unveiled the work of falsification that was accomplished by the Church after the Constantinian turn. An authentic Christian martyr and a philosopher in the service of faith, he was condemned for heresy because, despite the revisions of his doctrine, his Christology was still that of an angel-messiah and his Jesus found his source in Joshua. In addition, he had sympathies for the New Prophecy, and he devoted himself to asceticism with a disconcerting rigor, which authorized him to scorn the apostate clergy of his era — the heritage of which the Constantinian Church would claim.

Origen's work was reduced, as if by chance, to tiny fragments and held in several large volumes, so that the zeal of Rufin and other guardians of orthodoxy could take care to reconstitute it and rectify it according to the correct dogmatic line.

Born around 185 to Christian parents in Alexandria, the city of all the doctrines, Origen was in his adolescence when his father, Leonides, surrendered to punishment in 201, then perished in the persecutions of the New Prophecy.

Origen was initiated into Neo-Platonist philosophy, which he tried to accord with Christianity. A disciple of Clement of Alexandria, he combatted the work of Celse, *The True Discourse,* directed against the new religion. In Rome he met Hippolyte, a bishop and philosopher, to whom the *Elenchos* is sometimes attributed. In the same way that Hippolyte (like Tertullian and the Montanists) vituperated the laxity of another bishop of Rome, Callixte — whom many historians take for a pope — Origine, who succeeded Clement as the head of the Christian *didaskale* of Alexandria, entered into conflict with the bishop [named] Demetrius. It is true that Origen pushed the concern for chastity to the point of self-castration, so as to resist, without beating around the bush, the temptations of the flesh. Forced into exile in Cesarea in 231, he would die following tortures inflicted around 254 under the persecutions of Dece.

Badly noted by the clerical party of the *lapsi,* Origen drew upon himself — a century after his death — the displeasure of Epiphanius of Salamis, before being officially condemned by the Emperor Justinian the First, at the second Council of Constantinople in 553.

The Church reproached Origen for having neglected the historical character of Jesus-Christ, no doubt too recently invented, which the skill of Rufinus — who amended, expurgated and corrected everything that did not agree with the dogma — did not succeed in introducing.

Interpreting the Bible in an allegorical sense, Origen identified the Christ with an eternal Logos named Joshua, who returned to the Father without ceasing to be present in the spirit of the Christians. His commentaries on Jesus, son of Noun, explain that "God gave the name that is above names to Jesus-Christ our Lord. Therefore, the name that is above all names is Jesus […] And because this name is above all names, over the generations no one has received it." And interpreting the Bible in an allegorical sense recalls the first mention of Jesus. It is found in *Exodus*: "God summoned Jesus and sent him to fight against Amalec."

In her preface to *Homelies on Joshua/Jesus,* Annie Jaubert emphasizes the importance of the typology of Joshua: "The reason is that this typology constituted itself precisely in opposition to Judaism. No one being greater for the Jews than Moses, prophet and legislator, the Christians had to prove that the Old Testament, through the person of Jesu Nave, had already manifested the superiority of Jesus over Moses."[278]

[278] A. Jaubert, preface to *Homelie sur Josue/Jesus d'Origen,* Paris, 1960.

How can we not infer from such reasoning the appearance of Jesus as the mythical founder of Christianity at the beginning of the Second Century, a double of Moses whom the Greco-Roman *remake* [English in original] would erect as a Montanist agitator and then founder of the Roman Church?

Origen actually conserved a Christianity of which the spirit was originally formed in Alexandria, in the circles of Essene, Nazarene, Philonian and Elchasaite speculations. Like Clement, he remained a Gnostic in the sense that knowledge unveiled to consciousness what the faith of the New Prophecy revealed to the body, that is, a purification in which access to salvation resides. At this price, God, in the infinity of his love, would accord a universal redemption in which the demons and the Devil himself would be saved.

Despite the calumnies of the so-called "Church Fathers," the least limited of whom admired his erudition, Origen would be perpetuated in the works of Pseudo-Denys the Areopagite, Gregoire of Nysse, John Scot Erigene, nay, Hildegarde von Bingen and Eckhardt.

Paul Of Samosate, Bishop Of Antioch

At the beginning of the Fourth Century, in Edessa, King Abgar — converted to the religion that had recently been recognized by the State — circulated personal letters addressed to Jesus-Christ and to which he had obligingly responded. Thus Abgar re-engaged for his own profit the operation engaged in by the Church so as to loan to Jesus, Paul and Peter the status of historical personages. Rejected much later as gross fakes, these letters only differed from the New Testament by their (quite elevated) degreee of improbability.

Like all of the potentates touched by the racketeering of Rome, King Abgar used Catholicism as an instrument of power. He reorganized the clergy of the city, conferred upon it a monarchal form, transformed the temples into churches, the traditional festivals into consecrations of the saints, and religiously furnished the space and time of the city, as the Church would undertake to do at the level of the Imperium Romanum.[279]

Paul of Samosate, bishop of Antioch in 260, anticipated King Abgar's reforms by 50 years. To the authority of the governor of the Church of Antioch, he added that of the governor of the Syrian province of Commagene and secretary of finances to Queen Zenobia of Palmyra.

Personage of the first rank in the region, Paul of Samosate was on the best terms with Zenobia, and favored a Syrian nationalism that aroused the suspicions and encouraged the rebellions of his peers and ecclesiastical rivals. A synod united in Antioch deposed him in 268.

Paul of Samosate's doctrine showed the line of uncertainty in which the debate on the nature of the Christ was still stuck. For Paul of Samosate, God engendered the Logos that could be called the Son. The Logos inspired Moses and the prophets, then Jesus, who was only a man when, during baptism, the Logos entered him and transformed him into a perfect being. From then on, he accomplished miracles, triumphed over sin in himself and all men, with the result that his death redeemed and saved all of humanity. He pre-existed and judged the living and the dead.

Ironically, the synod that deposed Paul of Samosate would reject the term *homoousios* (consubstantial) by which he designated the identity of God and the Christ; this was the same quality that the Church would impose in the Fourth Century as the only trinitary truth.

[279] H.J.W. Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa,* p. 196.

His conception of the Trinity, it is true, took a personal turn that was not compatible with the idea that the Church would forge in the Fourth Century. According to Leontus of Byzantium, "he gave the name of Father to God, who created all things; the name of Son to himself, who was purely a man; and Spirit to the grace that resulted from the apostles."[280]

Theodore of Mopsueste attributed to Paul of Samosate a remark, the echo of which — a thousand years later — would still reverberate among the Amaurians and the partisans of the Free Spirit: "I do not envy the Christ because he had been made God, but because such as he was made, I was made, since he is found in my nature."[281]

The enemies of Paul of Samosate did not exaggeratedly yield to the facilities of the lie when they affirmed that, in Antioch, the psalms that were sung were less in honor of God than in his honor. Paul accorded a place for women in religious offices, but nothing permits one to affirm that this was not in the manner of the Montanists and their virginal prophetesses.

The heresiologues detected his influence in the Nestorianism of the Fifth Century and in the Paulician movement that struggled against Byzantium in the Eighth Century.

[280]Leontius of Byranze, *De sectis,* 3, 3.

[281]Theodore of Mopsueste, *Une controverse avec les Macedoniens,* Paris, 1913.

Chapter 18: Novatian, the Apostate Clergy and the Anti-Montanist Reaction

The breath of popular Christianity stirred up the pyres in which the faithful were consumed and which nourished the resentment of the crowds accustomed to pogroms and hunting for Jews. The imperial power would impute, according to custom, responsibility for the disorders not to the executioners, but the victims. The State's persecutions triggered cunningly fomented lynchings, which indiscriminately struck all of the partisans of a God who was hostile to the other divinities.

In 202 — contrary to the wishes (or so one says) of his wife, Julia Mammea, who was favorable to the new religion — Septime Severe promulgated an edict that prohibited proselytism, whether Jewish or Christian. The death of the emperor suspended this repression; it was revived under Maximin, not without sporadically rekindling in the ordinary flames of the pogroms. One of them exploded in Cappadoce, at the instigation of the governor. The pogrom in Alexandria in 249 inspired increased rigor on the part of Dece. Thus he dreamed of restoring the ancient religious values and reinvogorating the unity of the Empire through the annihilation of the Jews and the Christians. A similar project revolved in the heads that the influential bishops kept on their shoulders. Little by little, a new doctrine was formed, a realistic and political Christianity: Catholicism.

Among the small number of victims of the trials begun in 250, the philosopher Origen, an adept of Montanist asceticism, died following prolonged torture.

A rescript by Valerian, promulgated against the Christians in 257, suggested not a repudiation of their cult, but sacrifices that needed to be made to the ancient gods. The edict of tolerance issued by Gallian reestablished the peace in 260. Nevertheless, the idea of a national religion pursued its course. Emperor Aurelian, penetrated by the desire to revive the brilliance of Rome, through the radiance of a universal belief, readjusted the old monotheism of the *Sol invictus,* the cult of the Sun King, for his own uses. Death prevented him from regilding a scepter that ecclesiastical propaganda would soon recuperate: it assimilated Jesus-Christ into the unconquered Sun. Under the ferule of the bishops who were stuck on their perogatives and on the look-out for all profitable compromises the austere Christianity of the Essenes, the Nazarenes, the Gnostics and the Marcionites, the New Prophecy prepared to prostitute itself devotedly to the State.

Starting with Galian's edict, the exercise of Christianity was tolerated by the police and the governors. But the truce was brutally interrupted to create room for the last and bloodiest of the repressions, that of Diocletian, who from 303 to 305 pursued Christians and Manicheans in an equally crazy fury. Those who abjured — and they were many — ceased to be worried.

The edict of tolerance issued by Galere in 311 suffered a brief interruption under Maximin, but he was vanquished in 313 by Licinius, whose victory announced the triumph of Christianity as the religion of the State.

Eusebius of Cesarea, the incense-bearer of the emperor, who, through cunning and flattery, assured his credit with the court, had good reason to undertake the exaltation of the faith and the firmness of the martyrs, whom he estimated to number in the tens of thousands. Frend, a historian of the

persecutions, enumerates between 2,500 and 3,000 victims in the East and 500 in the West over the course of more than a century.[282] (The catacombs of La Via Latina date from the years 320–350 or 350–370. Contrary to the assertions of the Saint Sulpician legends, no known Christian sarcophagus is anterior to the Third Century.) Priests and bishops in the vicinity of Rome thus abjured more willingly than the Easterners, who were in solidarity with the local churches, whose the hostility to Roman power would not soon be disarmed and would arouse Donatism and Arianism before provoking the schism of Byzantium.

Eusebius's hyperbolic cult of the martyr makes one think of Stalin, who allied the glorification of the original Bolsheviks with the massacre of their survivors. Who worked more effectively for the triumph of Eusebius and the clerical bureaucracy, the net of which would be set down on the world? The *lapsi,* the apostates, the backsliders. As far as authentic Christianity, the party of the New Prophecy (the only holder of the palms of the martyrs), it would fall — under the name Montanism — into the trashcans of "heretical perversion."

From the beginning of the Third Century, the tension grew between the fervent Christians, who were more attached to the law than to life, and the bishops, whose sense of reality preferred a renegade priest to a dead priest. Passing through torment, the renegade actually disposed — for the greatest glory of the Church — the leisure to exploit the work of the martyrs for edifying ends. This was an old argument in which principles ceded place to necessity. The delirious masochism of the Christians of the Second Century offered to moderate spirits, it is true, several reasons for re-seizing and re-proving many of the offerings to death. All right. But the "party of the bishops," which was scorned by Hermas, Origen and Tertullian, employed itself — while Rome increased the amplitude of its repression — in the safeguarding of an ecclesiastical power that moderation made into a double blow by protecting itself from the furies of the police and by condemning an asceticism that was hardly compatible with Greco-Roman license.

Tertullian had already stigmatized the laxity of certain bishops and their taste for power. "*Episcopatus semulatio schismatum mater est,*" he wrote in his *Adversus Valentinos*: "The rivalry of bishops is the source of schisms."

Callixte, one of the principal bishops of Rome between 217 and 222, drew the reprobation of another bishop, Hippolyte, sometimes identified as the author of the *Elenchos.* Accused of laxity because he accorded ordination to remarried priests (Tertullian and Montanism prohibited remarriage), Callixte entered into the category of heretic for the author of the *Elenchos*: "A Christian from another school sinned; this sin, whatever it was, was not imputed to him, they say, provided that the guilty one embraced the school of Callixte." The school of Callixte — whom the historians take to be a pope and whose name was given to the catacombs — was, according to the *Elenchos,* in the hands of the henchmen of abortion: "It was then that the women, self-avowed Christians, began to make use of medications capable of preventing conception and bandages destined to make them have abortions."[283]

Pseudo-Hippolyte did not hesitate to situate Callixte in the line of the Elchasaitism that had been born in the third year of Trajan's rule (around 100); a certain Alcibiade possessed the Elchasaites' sacred book. The heresy, as it appeared here and as would be confirmed later, at first circumscribed a category in which anything that opposed or contested the bishop's authority was pushed in an opprobrious manner. Assassinated during a riot in 222, Callixte incurred the displeasure of the *Elenchos* for the "lax" politics that would open the doors of holiness for him. Even better, the dictionaries would

[282]Frend [*Translator*: rest of footnote missing from original.]

[283]A. Siouville, *Hippolyte de Rome: Philosophoumena ou Refutation de toutes les heresies,* Paris, 1928, p. 194.

consecrate Callixte the sixth Pope of Rome, although the papacy did not appear until the Seventh Century.

* * *

Around 250, Cyprian, bishop of Carthage — in which Tertullian and the New Prophecy were dominant — set himself up as the defender of the *lapsi.* His doctrine, expounded in an essay called *On the unity of the Church,* laid the political foundations for Catholicism. For him, every legitimate bishop was the inheritor of the "flesh of Peter" and had the right to combat anyone who contested him. Such was the principle that most often founded heresy. The expression "flesh of Peter" was intended to reinforce the local power that would be attacked by Etienne, Bishop of Rome around 254–257, who sketched out the Fourth Century conflict between Rome, which monopolized the "flesh of Peter" and accredited the execution of Simon-Peter in the imperial city, and the churches firmly implanted in the East.

Against ecclesiastical *Realpolitik,* Novatian attempted to revive the ardors of Montanist faith. Ordained a bishop in 249, he did not escape from the quarrels about precedence, which set the community leaders against each other. After the execution of Bishop Fabian, Novatian took control of a part of the Roman clergy and extolled a rigor that was steeled by asceticism and the duties of the faith. Indignant about the great number of faithful people and priests who abjured by agreeing to make sacrifices to the emperor or by buying certificates of abjuration, Novatian refused to re-admit into the community those guilty of repudiation. Opposed to another bishop of Rome named Cornelius — a partisan of moderation — Novatian developed a penitential current and assured himself of the support of many churches. He ordained himself on the basis of other bishops rallied to his determinations.

Novatian's doctrine emanated directly from the New Prophecy. In *On the Advantages of Chastity,* he implored the members of the "Virginal Church" to remain pure so as to keep a place of welcome for the Holy Spirit. Tertullian did not say otherwise. The influence of Origen is detectable in his text *On Jewish Food,* in which he perceived an allegorical description of the vices in the dishes condemned by the biblical texts.

Novatian's enemies, Cornelius of Rome and Cyprian of Carthage, held in esteem a treatise later called *On the Trinity,* although the word *trinitas* does not figure in it. This treatise discourses upon the unity of the Father and the Son. Because the Son of God became man, he could lead humanity to eternal salvation. After the Constantinian turn, such speculations would be invoked in support of a conflict that it would accentuate: the one between the local churches, which were close to the faithful and attentive to matters of faith, and the centralized and bureaucratized Church of Rome and its emperor.[284]

[284] H.J. Vogt, *Coetus Sanctorum: Der Kirchenbegriff des Novatian und die Geschicte seiner Sonderkirche,* Bonn, 1968.

Chapter 19: Arianism and the Church of Rome

The Council of Nicaea, convened on the orders of Constantine in 325, marks the birth of orthodoxy and, consequently, heresy. The tortuous line of the dogma that would take centuries to make its immutable truths precise arrogated for itself the privilege of a rectitude that people like Eusebius, Epiphanius, Augustine, Jerome and their cohorts would extend back into the past and to Jesus, the chosen founder of the Catholic invariance.

The Church would push cynicism to the point of claiming for itself a Christianity that would condemn the following manifestations as heresies: Nazarenism, Elchasaitism, Marcionism, anti-Marcionism, Christian Gnosticism and the New Prophecy.

In the Third Century, the notion of *hairesis* — questionable choices, subject to polemic — became a weapon, thanks to which the bishops could defend their privileges against all contestation. In the hands of emperors, then popes, heresy would be juridically assimilated as a crime of high treason. When the popes uprooted from the declining empire the ecclesiastical authority that they had arrogated for themselves, they perpetuated in law the old Roman legislation that had once been used against the Jews and the Christians, who had been deemed "rebels" against the State and "perverts" contravening the moral order.

By imposing himself as emperor by divine right, Constantine led a political enterprise in which his predecessors had only succeeded mediocrely. The party of collaborators that the Christian *lapsi* constitued encountered the aims of Constantine, who — having vanquished Maximin and Licinius — wanted to consolidate the unity of the Empire. Nourished by the conception of an ecclesiastical monarchism that erected the New Jerusalem in Rome, national security [*la raison d'Etat*] presided over the birth of Catholicism, the triumph of which would always remain burdened by the memory of the Christianities that founded it and that it would treat as bastards and abortions.

The polemics of the first three centuries entered into the freedom of options. The Council of Nicaea defined religious truth and, from then on, inaugurated the permanence of the lie: the forgery of gospels, the falsification of writings, the destruction of heterodox works, and the fabrication of an official history to which the majority of erudite people and historians still subscribe to this day.

Constantine touched by grace? Here we go. I borrow the following lines from the Catholic, Henri Guillemin: "Constantine did not believe in 'Jesus-Christ' in any fashion; he was a pagan and he would only convert (if he ever did so) upon his death in 337. When he ordered the meeting at Nicaea in 325, he was only being prudent, a realist, a 'pragmatic' and, when faced with the growing numerical importance in his empire of the sectarians of 'Krestos,' he drew from this fact the consequences that imposed themselves concerning the well-being of his government."[285]

On his death-bed, the Emperor found the true father of Catholicism: Eusebius of Cesarea.

[285] H. Guillemin, *L'Affaire Jesus,* Paris, 1962, p. 75.

Eusebius Of Cesarea

In his commentary on the *Life of Constantine,* written by Eusebius of Cesarea, Jacob Burkhardt qualifies him as the "first totally dishonest and unjust historian of ancient times."[286]

To understand the necessity in which Eusebius fabricated an *Ecclesiatical History,* canonical texts and an apostolic filiation with the scattered pieces of a puzzle of three centuries, it is fitting to recall that he was, above all, the first theorist to "introduce a rational conception of imperial power into the interior of a coherent ideology and metaphysics."[287]

For Eusebius, "the terrestrial kingdom is in the image of the celestial kingdom." The task of the sovereign is that of the Logos: to make the law rule over the here-below. "Carrying the image of the celestial kingdom, eyes fixed on heaven, he led and governed mortals on the model of the archetype through imitation of the monarchal power (of the Logos)."[288]

Eusebius's history of the Church logically leads to the theology that he developed and that is nothing other than the justification of the power of Constantine, the incarnation of the Logos through the grace of God, whom he is duty-bound to serve:

> God the Father, whom he called the Supreme Emperor, had certainly created the world. Having created it, he enclosed it in the reins of divine wisdom, making the constraints of time and the cycle of the years submit to him. But he trusted this world, once created, to his unique son, the Word [*Verbe*]. Eusebius of Cesarea made of him 'the emminent moderator of the world,' the 'common conserver of all things'; the Cosmos produced him so that he could govern it; 'God entrusted him with the reins of this universe.' 'He received from the infinitely good Father a hereditary role'; 'he rules what is in the interior as well as in the exterior of the vault of heaven,' and imposes harmonization on all things.
>
> The Logos is thus the governor of the Cosmos, the one who maintains order in creation. It produces harmony among all things, much later, added Eusebius of Cesarea. He [the Son] was not a viceroy totally exterior to the ensemble that he governed. He was the soul and spirit of the world. Indeed, Eusebius of Cesarea described his function in a characteristic passage: 'The Divine Word [*Verbe*],' he said, 'is not composed of parts and is not constituted from contraries, but is simple and indivisible. In the same way, in a body, the parts and members, the viscera and the intestines are multiple in their assemblage, but a unique soul, a unique spirit, indivisible and incorporeal, is spread throughout the ensemble; likewise, in the universe, the world itself is one, all being combined from multiple parts, but the Divine Word, endowed with an immense and all-powerful force, unique to it, deployed in the universe, does not stray from the adventure but spreads through all things and the cause of all that is made among them.'[289]

Thenceforth, theology would furnish its privileged framework to the risks of ecclesiastical politics and imperial power, still in solidarity despite violent rivalries. Theology thus seized the two doctrines that offered neither novelty nor anything religiously shocking: Donatism and Arianism. The first inscribed itself in the line of the New Prophecy and Novatian; the second revived Gnostico-Christian speculations and the relations between God and his messiah.

[286] R.L. Wilker, *Le Mythe des origines chretiennes,* Paris, 1971, p. 58.
[287] J. Jarry, *Heresies et factions dans l'Empire byzantin du IV au VII siecle,* Le Caire, 1968, p. 189.
[288] *Ibid.,* p. 192.
[289] *Ibid.,* pp. 190 et 191.

Arius

Although his name was invested with a glory propagated by the artifice of an alleged Arian party, neither Arius' life nor his works justified the celebrity with which he was gratified. Born in Libya or Alexandria in 260, he studied with Lucien of Antioch and lived in Alexandria, where he was mentioned for the first time by Peter, bishop of the city, executed in 311. He belonged to the category of priests lying in wait for honors and preeminences. The partisan of Melititius of Lycopolis, a rival of the deceased Peter, Arius acceded to the priesthood under the bisphoric of someone named Alexander. Extolling asceticism, his popularity grew among the faithful who were always receptive to the old influence of Montanism, renewed by Novatian.

In 318, Arius opposed himself to this bishop, reproaching him with having attributed an equal eternity to the Father and the Son in a sermon. For Arius, the Son was neither eternal nor equal to the Father; created according to the principle of all things, he only received his divine nature once invested with his mission as savior on earth. The first opinion was related to Jewish, Essene and Nazarene Gnosticism, according to which Adam, or the new Adam erected as the redeemer messiah, was the co-creator of the world. The second picked up from Montanism [the following]: the messiah was a man, sharing in the vicissitudes of common human existence, but the Divine Spirit was incarnated in him from birth, since he was the son of Sophia or Mary. The two [opinions] inscribed themselves in the evolution of the Christianity of the first [few] centuries.

A synod of a hundred bishops, convened around 318 or 319, excluded Arius and his partisans from the Christian community and refused him communion, which marked belonging to the congregation. He left Alexandria and went to Nicodemia, where he enjoyed the support of Bishop Eusebius, not without having written a pamphlet called *Thalia* (the Banquet) in verse and prose, which knew a great popular success. Alexander retorted through a detailed report on the quarrel. The hostility of Licinius to the Christians and his war against Constantine relegated the debates to the second plane of preoccupations, but once Constantine was master of the Empire (after the defeat of Licinius), he invested himself triumphantly in Constantine's double sovereignty, spiritual and temporal, and — at the request of Arius' friends — convened a council at Nicaea, not far from Nicomedia.

In 325, Constantine — circumvented by his councilor Hosius of Cordoue, who won Alexander over to the party of the bishop — convinced three hundred bishops to take up positions against Arius.

The credo of Nicaea resulted from an imperial opinion that was hostile to Arius' theory, according to which "God is when the Son is not," and "he didn't exist before birth." He made the Son a "true God issued from the true God and forming the same substance with the Father," which translates the Greek term *homoiousios.*

Arius obeyed and renounced his doctrine. In 328, Eusebius of Nicomedia and Theognis of Nicaea, exiled with their friend Arius, regained their world [*siecle*]. In 335, the synod of Tyr rehabilitated Arius. Constantine, whose sole desire in excluding them was to assure the unity of the young universal Church, was preparing to reintegrate him into the clergy of Alexandria when the unfortunate protestor died in 336. (The official Christian version of his death wanted to let fly at him the last arrow of polemical elegance by propagating the rumor that he had unexpectedly trespassed by satisfying an urgent need. Abbey Pluquet, following other heresiologues, rejoiced in such a brilliant proof of divine wrath.[290])

[290] Abbe Pluquet, *Memoires pour servir a l'histoire des egarements,* Besancon, 1817, article "Arianisme."

From an inconsistent quarrel — in which only the authority of the emperor, elevated to the dignity of *pontifex maximus* (pontifical sovereignty), was important — the theologians drew an enormous jumble of implications that were as thunderous as they were empty. Underneath the quibbles of this Arian party, artificially swelled so as to give importance to the negligible, there raged a power struggle between Rome and the Eastern churches, and an unceasing combat between the West and Byzantium.

From a speculative point of view, it was easy to brandish the reproach of dualism, nay, Marcion's "two Gods" against Bishop Alexander and his thesis of the "Eternal God, the Eternal Son." The credo of Nicaea implied a unique God so as to parry Marcionism, which the Manichean religion would claim for itself.

Upon the death of Constantine I, reconciliation seemed to rule. Nevertheless, quite soon his successor, Constant, supported the party of Nicaea, while in the East Constantine II gave his support to the Arians. After the death of Constant in 350, Constantine II, manoeuvering through many councils, attempted to Arianize the West and hunt down Arius' enemies.

Nevertheless, dissent was born from the sudden victory of Arianism. Three factions emerged: the Anomeans affirmed that the Son was not similar (*anomoios*) to the Father; the semi-Arians or *homoiousians* affirmed that the Son participated in the same substance (*homoiousios*) as the Father; and the *homoeians* that the Son was like (*homoios*) the Father.

In fact, doctrinal positions were only pawns on the chessboard of rival influences: Valens, emperor from 364 to 378, inclined in favor of the *homoeians.* Gratian and Theodose the First (*) defended Nicaea. The decrees of 380 and 381 condemned Arianism, chased its partisans from the Church and foreshadowed many executions, the first victims of orthodoxy before Priscillian. In 381, the Council of Constantinople reaffirmed the credo of Nicaea and condemned the semi-Arians, the *homoiousians.*

(*) Theodose imposed on all the Christians an orthodox faith to which he gave the repressive firmness that would thenceforth prevent deviation from national security [*la raison d'Etat*]. In the strict sense, he was the founder of Catholic orthodoxy.

With the emergence of a State religion, the *episcopatus aemulatio,* the path to episcopal honors (which Tertullian mocked and labeled the "mother of all schisms"), freed itself much more easily because the destiny of the martyr was no longer dreaded.

A rhetorician in Antioch and born in Sicily around 300, Aetius was a disciple of Arius before he founded the Anomean party and assured his own doctrine by discerning a dissimilarity between the Father and the Son, a dissimilarity in which the Logos or Holy Spirit was incarnated. A friend of Emperor Gallus, Aetius used certain opportunities to make his views triumph, but his fate was the opposite. Condemned to exile upon the fall of Gallus (354), he aroused the reprobation of the Council of Ancyre (358) and Constantinople (360). Summoned by Emperor Julian and named bishop, he canceled his functions upon the death of the last tolerant emperor (the one whom the Church named the Apostate because he wanted to restore religious freedom). Aetius participated in the revolt of Procope, cousin of Julian, and barely escaped capital punishment, and died soon thereafter in Constantinople, where his secretary, Eunome, would develop a doctrine according to which the Father and the Son, dissimilar in essence, were united by the same will.

Athanase, Alexander's successor, combatted the theses of Arius and Aetius, reinforced the Nicaean party and invented the Arian party in his *Discourse Against the Arians*; he dressed Arianism up as a power that threatened faith and made Arius the very spirit of heresy.

From theological hyperbole — in which banal power rivalries between the notables of Rome, Alexandria, Antioch and Constantinople were played out — burst forth an Arian missionary vocation that failed to carry off the palm of orthodoxy by winning the sympathy of the new rival powers in Rome.

Constantine only condemned Arius with an eye on guaranteeing the unity of the Church and the unity of the Empire. Arius threatened stability and order to the limited extent that his influence gathered the adhesion of a great number of people. Constantine was not unacquainted with the one who, exiling Arius, condemned Athanase, his principal enemey, to the same fate. Likewise, Constantine II — in the uncertainty in which orthodoxy was still situated — also put Athanase and Aetius aside. Anyone could capsize at any moment. Weakened by the edict of tolerance issued by Emperor Julian (361–363), the two parties would each know a manner of victory. The Nicaeans carried off the West; the Anomean missionaries converted the Goths, who, invading Spain and North Africa, imposed Arianism on them. As far as Byzantium, whose hostility with respect to Rome did not cease to grow, it gave its schism a theological pretext by rejecting a post-Nicaea formula that was born in Spain during the Seventh Century: "The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *and* from the Son," a quarrel that was called *Filioque* (and of the Son).

The rivalries between Arian, anti-Arian and pseudo-Arian factions rallied a good number of individuals in search of social promotion or animated by simple opportunism. (Thus the schismatic Lucifer, the Bishop of Cagliari in Sardinia, laid the bases for an anti-Arian Church for his own profit.) Was not Acace, bishop and successor of Eusebius of Cesarea, successively Arian under Constance, Nicaean under Jovian, and Anomean under Valens? Such was the case with many.

More interesting was Aerius, priest of Pontus, ordained by Eustathe, Bishop of Sebaste, against whom he entered into conflict, reproaching him for abandoning the ascetic conduct to which he subscribed before attaining dignity.

Aerius inscribed himself in the counter-current of Nicaea and religious State-ification by advancing the opinion that no difference in rank between priest and bishop should exist. He condemned the pomp of the ceremonies multiplied by the Church and judged useless the prayers for the dead, which was a source of revenue for the clergy. According to him, Easter did away with Jewish superstition. Epiphanius of Salamis — who used a procedure that would be popular among the inquisitors of the Middle Ages, that is to say, confusion — assimilated him with the Arians, to whom he thus imputed hostile feelings for the [Church] hierarchy.

Chapter 20: Donat and the Circoncellions

From the moment that Constantine agreed to support the Christian communities in 313, he took hold of the Church and treated it as an instrument of his State power. To the bishops he recognized, he accorded the license to promulgate sentences under imperial protection [*caution*]. His politics of great works (in Rome, Saint Peter, Saint John of Lateran and Saint Agnes; in Jerusalem, Saint Sepulcre), which honored a faith that he openly mocked if it did not cement his own absolutism, aroused the reprobation of a popular Christianity that had been impregnated by asceticism and martyrdom ever since the end of the Second Century.

An old contention opposed the party of the tortured, the Christians who remained unshakeable in their convictions [even] when faced with their executioners, and the party of the *lapsi* or *traditores,* the renegades, the traitors, who were more numerous and, due to their very pragmatism, better accustomed to accede to the clerical responsibilities thenceforth conferred by the State.

In Carthage, the bastion of Tertullianism, the most significant incident exploded, precipitated by the anti-Montanist reaction that took place underneath the goblets [*la coupe*] of a corrupted clergy.

During the persecution of Diocletian, which was brief but cruel (303–305), the majority of the clergy abjured. A small group of priests from Abitina (Tunisia), imprisoned in the expectation of torture, denounced the *traditores.* They proclaimed that only those who, following their example, remained loyal to belief would reach paradise. Their intransigence would irritate the clergy of Carthage and, in particular, the Archdeacon Caecilianus (Cecilian), much later accused of preventing other Christians from bringing food and comfort to prisoners.[291]

When Cecilian succeded the bishop of Carthage, who died in 311, the majority of the faithful reacted with indignation. A young bishop named Donatus led the movement of contestation.

Born in Numidia, Donat had already attracted attention as a young bishop in Casa Nigra by demanding, at the conclusion of the persecutions, a new baptism for the lapsed clergy. Concerning these pleas, a council of 70 bishops who met in 312 deposed Cecilian and replaced him with Majorinus, chaplain of Lucilla, a rich Spaniard executed under the reign of the collaborating bishop.

That same year, Constantine crushed his rival, Maxence, and seized North Africa, which had until then been subjected to the fallen emperor. With the sanction [*jugement*] of the Roman clergy, in which apostasy was dominant, he restored Cecilian to his responsibilities, allotted him an important subsidy and exempted from all taxes the clergy who obeyed the renegade.

Meanwhile, upon the death of Majorinus, Donat succeded him with the consent of Cecilian's enemies, who sent the emperor a list of the crimes imputed to his protege. Donat went to Rome to plead his legitimacy, but Militiades, a Roman bishop whom Constantine consulted because of his African origins, took sides against him, which caused his condemnation by the emperor.

Essentially careful to unify his empire, Constantine moved from threats to conciliation. In 321, he repealed the decree of exile that struck Donat, whose influence had not ceased to grow. In 336, two-hundred and seventy bishops controlled the communities in a territory that today stretches from

[291] *Acta Saturnini,* in *P.L.,* 18, 8, 701.

Tunisia to East Algeria, in which the lax party of Cecilian was in the minority. In Egypt, the Donatist bishop Melece enjoyed great popular support.

No doubt Donat benefited from the tacit tolerance of imperial power, that is, until the peasant revolt of the Circoncellions was grafted on to his movement, thereby forming its popular wing.

In 346, a commando group of Circoncellions attacked the commission sent to North Africa by the emperor. Despite their disapproval of this action, Donat and his principal partisans were exiled to Gaul, where the bishop of Casa Nigra died in 355.

The Circoncellion movement allied with religious fanaticism (hostile to the laxity of the wealthy) the demands of the disinherited of the countryside: laborers, shephards, slaves, poor peasants. Their name came from *circum cellas,* those who wander around the barns (*cellae*).

They called themselves "saints" and "fighters" (*agonistes*), terms issued from Essenism and Judeo-Christianity. Armed with the billy club that they called Israel, the Circoncellions attacked large property owners and functionaries, liberating slaves to whom they entrusted the task of treating their [former] masters as they had been treated in servitude. They combatted the Devil in the person of his representatives: terrestrial owners, tax collectors, magistrates and anti-Donatist priests. They acted under the leadership of two men, Axide and Phasir, "*duces sanctorum"* (leaders of saints), who, according to Optat (340), "made owners and creditors tremble."[292] The Circoncellions supported the cult of the martyrs and opposed the sanctification of asceticism to the lazy and hedonistic existence of the rich.

Disavowed by the Donatists, the Circoncellions could not resist the imperial army and ended up massacred around 348.

Nevertheless, Donatism would survive until 429. It rejected the principal demands of the Circoncellions, so often reprised by the [various] millenarianist movements: the reign of the saints; universal equality under the sole power of God; moratoria on debts; judgments and executions of the rich; and the suppression of slavery.

Donat, who at the beginning cautioned against the zeal of the Circoncellions in their hunt for apostates, would approve of their suppression but would not recover his credit with the emperor.

The party of the *lapsi* and the laxists retook the upper hand. Optat attacked his adversaries in *Against the Donatists.* From 399 to 415, Augustine of Hippone undertook to chase them from Carthage. Moreover, they were outlawed, starting in 411.

Thanks to one of the many ironies of history, Donatism would disappear in 429, at the same time that Roman colonization was swept by the invasion of the Vandals, who imposed as the religion of the State the very Arianism that had been condemned as heresy.

The social and political components that had assured the success of Donatism also conducted it towards its downfall. The nationalistic demands of Numidia and Mauritania uncovered motifs of satisfaction in Donat's opposition to Rome and in his project of creating an African Catholic Church. When he demanded (according to Optat's *Against the Donatists*)[293] "What has the emperor to do with the Church?" the response was doubly articulated. His Church — beyond which, as with the Church of Rome, "there was no salvation" — refused to submit to the imperial power of an emperor who was at once the head of State and the leader of the clergy. He defended the principle of national churches, independent of a central power.

[292]Optat, *Contra Parmenien le Donatiste.*

[293]ID., *op. cit.,* ed. Vassal-Philips, 1917, 3, 3.

But Donat also contested the preeminence of temporal power over spiritual power. Such would be the opinion of the papacy, starting from the Seventh Century. Augustine, an enemy of Donatism and a partisan of spiritual preeminence, was not deceived; he borrowed from the Donatist theologian Tychonius the doctrine of the two cities, the terrestrial city and the city of God.

On the other hand, Donat's Montanism and Tertullianism went against the attempts of the Church of Rome to reconcile itself with a Latin aristocracy that was little inclined to asceticism and puritanism. His church wanted to be the "Virgin Church" of Tertullian, in opposition to the temporal church of the *lapsi.* It was to be a "closed garden," a refuge for the people suffering for God, a place in which the perjured priests could have no part.

The Donatists did not allow — and [here] one finds again the arguments of the *Elenchos* against Callixte, bishop of Rome — that a dignitary who had lost his celestial existence so as to save his terrestrial life had the right to pursue his ministry. The sacraments accorded by such a bishop were deprived of value. The sacred character of the function did not accommodate itself to a forfeiture. The clergy of Rome, in which the *lapsi* were in the majority, thought otherwise. For them, any bishop was invested with the right to give the sacraments, even if, as a man, he showed himself unworthy of the sacredness that he distributed. This was an endemic conflict, one that clarified — from a certain angle — the very notion of heresy: provided that he did not put aside dogma, a priest, bishop or pope could surrender himself to debauchery and infamy without losing the grace that the Church accorded him, insofar as he remained an obedient son. But practicing virtue by contravening orthodoxy in his discourse brought upon him damnation in the beyond and the here-below.

Against Donat, Augustine would formulate his doctrine concerning the nature of the Church and the sacraments. Not only did he summon police repression against individuals and groups that put Catholic orthodoxy aside, he also made precise the point that the sacraments act *ex opere operato*,[294] through the sacred character of the [Church] official.

[294] *Translator's note*: "from the works performed," that is, from the sacrament itself.

Chapter 21: The Spirituals, Also Called Messalians or Euchites

Unlike Arianism, Donatism and Monophysism — which, born from rivalries of nations and churches, might better be characterized as schisms rather than heresies — the movement of the "Spirituals," who were called Messalians or Euchites by their adversaries, was only Christian in appearance, under which was expressed the ordinary taste for life, so easily diverted [*tourne*] by dereliction, leveling and destructive asceticism, or religious or political fanaticism.

By combatting the rigor of the New Prophecy, as it was perpetuated by Novatian, Donat and the Circoncellions, the Church of Rome used a political wisdom of which many popes later showed themselves to be worthy inheritors. Though it was protected by its status as a unique religion, Catholicism did not win the game. Other than a minority, the Greco-Roman aristocracy was reluctant to banish from its everyday life the pleasures of the bed, the table, nay, the bloody games of the circus. Unlike the "Virgin Church" dear to Tertullian and Donat, the Catholic, apostolic and Roman Church required a strict obedience to its authority and representatives by those who accorded the sacraments and the remission of sin. In all the acommodations thus rendered possible — and the specifications of Augustine of Hippone would soon come to clarify things — nothing prevented a Roman citizen inclined towards hedonism from embracing Catholicism. Priests, bishops and popes, moreover, would only put the brakes on their ordinary debaucheries after the Sixteenth Century, that is, after the cold shower of the Reformation, which washed the Catholic stains from its primitive Christianity, the true Western Christianity, anti-Semitic and puritan: the New Prophecy.

But the anti-Montanism of the Church also expressed the voice of wisdom. The trinity, by which the Church — as much as the Spirit — mediated between God and the Son who was incarnated in the weakness and corruption of human and terrestrial nature, also filled a primordial function: it avoided the confrontation of dualism; it set right the balance between good and evil, oppression and revolt, repression [*refoulement*] and relief [*defoulement*]. The reverse of Puritanism, it was unbridled license. In this sense, the "Messalian" movement constituted the antithetical continuation of Montanism.

In his *Hymns about the Heresies,* which were composed between 363 and 373 in Edessa, Ephrem speaks of people who gave themselves up to a free morality under the cover of devotion. They called themselves *pneumatikoi,* "Spirituals." Their adversaries called them the Messalians (from the Syrian word *m'salleyane,* "those who pray") or Euchites (from the Greek *euchitai*).

Epiphanius of Salamis mentioned their presence in Antioch around 376 or 377. He described them as vagabonds who, refusing to possess any goods, slept in the streets of the town, men and women mixed together, rejecting all forms of work and contenting themselves with begging and praying.

Their initiator was Adelphius, but other names were linked to a current that was scattered everywhere, continued to perpetuate itself, and of which it is permitted to conjecture that it rallied together a great number of people who were drawn more by ephemeral ecstasy than by the prize of a hypothetical beyond — indeed, this current hasn't ceased to trace its furrows underneath the prudent ap-

pearances of religious obligation. Dadoes, Sabas, Hermas, Symeon and Eustathe of Edessa have been mentioned by Photius, Michael the Syrian, Bar-Hebraeus and Philoxene of Mabbourg.

In the 380s, Flavian, patriarch of Atioch, persecuted the Spirituals and chased them into the provinces of Lycaonia and Pamphylia, where they were condemned by the bishops around 388. In 390, Flavian of Antioch went further by anathematizing all of the Messalians, despite Adephius' attempts to defend their cause.

The persecution of the Spirituals was extended into Armenia. Letoios, bishop of Melitene, ordered the burning of monastaries into which the Messalian doctrine had penetrated. (The recidivists were condemned to having their shins sliced open.[295])

Around 405, Atticus, patriarch of Byzantium, insisted on the necessity of expelling the Messalians. Much later, Nestorius would associate himself with the struggle. In 428, the imperial police were tasked with intervening against the Spirituals and making them outlaws. In 431, the Council of Ephesus would ratify the measures previously taken, without great success, it would seem.

In the second half of the Fifth Century, the Spirituals united around Lampetius, a priest ordained around 460 by Alypius, the Bishop of Cesarea of Cappadoce. According to Theodore Barkonai, Lampetius founded in the mountanous region between Sicily and Isauria monasteries of men and women in which a joyous life was lived. (*) There were other places in Egypt where Lampetius enjoyed the protection of Alpheius, bishop of Rhinocoloura (El'Arich, near the Palestinian border). And how could they not revive the memory of Carpocratus in Alexandria? But the patriach of the city [El'Arich], either through nonchalance or sympathy, was content to demand an oral repudiation of error from the "uncultivated" people.

(*) In the Third and Fourth Centuries, the various ascetic Christianities condemned the women who lived with bishops, priests or deacons, and [worse] exercised sacramental functions, under the name "Agapete" (*agapetai,* "the beloved"). Relatively favorable to women, the Celtic tradition introduced the Agapetes into the new Christian cults of Ireland and Britain, in which, during the Sixth Century, there still existed monasteries composed of female hosts (*cohospitae*), who conferred the sacraments without, for all that, renouncing their [feminine] charms. The Arthurian legends would frequently evoke them. Around 150, *The Pastor* of Hermas gave an allegorical meaning to their double nature as libertines and holy "virgins."

The actions taken at the beginning of the Sixth Century by the pariarch of Antioch, and his refutation of a work by Lampetius entitled *Testament,* show the persistance of the movement, which was also being fought by the Monophysite Churches of Syria.

One would find Spirituals in Constantinople towards the end of the Sixth century, grouped around a convert named Marcian, from whom came the name Marcianites, according to Maxime the Confessor.[296] Photious, author of a Fourth Century study of the Messalians, speaks of contemporary heretics with whom he was involved.

* * *

In its most radical aspects, the Spirituals' doctrine was devoted to justifying the practice of a freedom that guaranteed them the feeling of having attained perfection and impeccability.

[295]Runciman, *Le Manicheisme medieval, op. cit.,* p. 31.

[296]Maxime the Confessor, *Scolies sur la hierarchie ecclesiastique de Denys,* in *P.G.,* 4, 3192b.

The Church essentially reproached them for their scorn of the sacraments and ecclesiatical hierarchy. Men and women lived in the streets or in monasteries, animated by the grace of having vanquished the demon that was in them, and thus acted with the assent of the angels and the Spirit.

From the remarks reported by their adversaries come elements of a philosophy that especially aimed to justify the pleasures of the way of life that they had chosen.

The fall of Adam introduced into every person, from birth, a demon that dominated and pushed him or her towards evil. Baptism and the sacraments remained inoperative against such a presence. Only prayer — and here it is not a question of the Church's prayers but continual and assiduous incantations — had the power to chase away the demon. Prayer must be accompanied by a severe asceticism, of a duration sometimes extended to three years. So as to end up in a state of equanimity — *apatheia* — that realized the union with the Spirit. The Spiritual thus recovers Adam before the Fall or, if you prefer, the Christ who is (according to Origen, Paul of Samosate, Donat and Nestorius) the man assumed by the Logo. (Certain Messalians would thus pass for Nestorians or Monophysites, before being denounced and hunted.)

The expulsion of the demon and the union with the Spirit evoked, according to the testimonies collected by Jean Damascene, the orgasm of amorous union. The Spirit, similar to fire, made man into a new being, recreating him because "fire is demiurge," fire is the ardor of desire and the Great Power of life, as with Simon of Samaria.

The Spiritual was thereafter invested with the prophetic gift; he was similar to the Christ and did not sin in whatever he did. The recourse to fasting, asceticism, mortification, discipline and the instruction of the soul fell into disuse.

Lampetius mocked the monks whom he saw deliver themselves up to abstinence and penitential clothing, because they showed by these things that they had not acceded to perfection. Nevertheless, the brood of Antoine and Macaire did not share his efforts in the daily struggle against the demons of lust that the Master of the altar piece from Isenheim would express with so much pictoral happiness.

Lampetius himself lived in pleasure, dressed in delicate clothes and unveiled to his disciples the road to perfection, which did not lack charm. "Bring me a beautiful young woman," he said, "and I will show you what holiness is."[297]

Proclaiming themselves to be blessed, the Spirituals inverted the project of holiness that had been pushed to extremes by the Montanists and that the anti-Montanist Church held within the enclosure of ascetic monasticism, (*) that is, within its hyperbolic martyrologues and within its calendar, in which the Gnostics' *daimon* that governed every day was replaced. Moreover, the Spirituals' pre-Adamite Christ had everything that would be displeasing to any church, with which they did quite well without, if one can judge from the singular road to salvation that they pursued.

(*) For example: the Ascetic and Catholic monks who, in 415, relieved themselves by flaying to death the beautiful genius Hypathia, philosopher and mathematician, in Alexandria.

Practicing a sovereign freedom, the Spirituals rejected work, which they held to be shameful activity. They advised against making alms to the poor and needy so as to reserve it for themselves, the truly poor in spirit, whose bodies needed to sustain themselves. Having rediscovered the purity of Adam, the Spirituals could unite with Eve in complete Edenic innocence.

[297] Photius, edited by Henry, p. 39.

Borborites, Coddians, Stratiotics, Phemionites

The heresiologues nourished a clear propensity to multiply, under a variety of names, the opinions that contravened their doctrine or that of the Church of Rome. The heresiologues intended to demonstrate by this the extent of confusion and incoherence that reigned from the moment that their views were set aside. It seems that the movement of the Spirituals was thus fragmented into many names, such as Stratiotics, Phemionites and Coddians (from the Syrian word *codda,* "plateus"), designating "those who eat apart."

The term Borborite merits some attention. Victor Magnien recalls that the *borboros* or quagmire symbolized the impure life in which the uninitiated dwelled.[298] Plotin identifies the Borborites with the third category distinguished by a number of Gnostics: the hylics, prisoners of matter.

The Borborites were the object of condemnation in a codex issued by Theodose II. According to Philostrogue, Aetius was reduced to silence by a Borborite.[299]

Ecclesiatical opinion gave to "Borborite" the meanings "dirty, filthy, uncultivated." In 480, Lazare of Pharb spoke of people who were "ignorant and mocked all beliefs." He said that one could apply the proverb to them, "For the pig's fiance, a bath in the cesspool."[300]

Is it a question of the uninitiated submitting to the perfect Spirituals, who strove through total destitution to wait for the relevation of the Spirit, from which absolute freedom proceeded? Or did the term ["Spirituals"] more simply designate the immense majority of the beings, tormented by the difficulties of existence, who merely hoped to glean the least pleasures without being preoccupied with some divinity other than fortunate or unfortunate chance?

[298] V. Magnian, *Les Mysteres d' Eleusis,* Paris, 1938.

[299] Philostorgue, *Epitome Historiarum,* III, in *P.G.,* LXV, 501–505.

[300] Quoted by Runciman, *op. cit.,* p. 34.

Chapter 22: Monophysites and Dyophysites

Three currents stood out from the tormented landscape that was presented by the ecclesiatical rivalries and quarrels of the Church, which was struggling for the recognition of its authority and preeminence. They corresponded to the two poles of imperial power: Rome and Byzantium, and the cradle of Hellenized Christianity, Alexandria.

Monophysism had more to do with schism than heresy. Born in Alexandria, this doctrine was not innovative but used old speculations on the nature of the Messiah to mark itself from Rome. After the Council of Chalcedoine, held in 451, the eastern Churches seized hold of the Jacobites of Syria and the Armenian churches, so as to constitute their dogma, which was still honored by the Egyptian Coptics. But it is also necessary to take account of the animosity that had not ceased to be manifested between Alexandria and Antioch, the city in which — from the end of the First Century — the communities devoted to Jacob and Simon-Peter had been implanted. The judgment of Tertullian was once more verified "*Episcopatus aemulatio mater schismatum est*."

By rejecting Arius, the Church of Rome had defined, through the credo of Nicaea, the rudiments of Catholic dogma: the Christ was God; he formed a single substance with the Father; although he was created for all eternity by the Father, he was incarnated by descending to earth and thus became a man entirely apart [from the others]. This was the position of Tertullian and, for Rome, it defined the role of the Church most advantageously: a spiritual and temporal power; the union of the celestial kingdom and the temporal kingdom. The Church was founded by God and by "Jesus, put to death under Pontius Pilate," whose two principal apostles, Peter and Paul, were martyred in Rome, designating by their sacrifice — according to the example of Christ — the legitimate place of the "Holy See."

Arianism, issued from Alexandria, established a subordinate relationship between God, the creator of all things, and the Son, created as any man but invested by the divine Logos. "Did you have a son before he was born?" Arius asked of mothers and his question, ironically aimed at the Mother Church, attacked the pretension of ecclesiastical Rome to divine perpetuity.

It was still from Alexandria and Cyrille, a disciple of Athanase (Arius' enemy), that the revolt against Rome came. The revolt grafted itself to one of the specious quarrels in which Alexandria and Antioch had engaged for centuries.

There was the unique substance of the Father, the Son and the Logos, or Spirit, but was it the nature, the *physis* of this Jesus who was a man entirely apart and, at the same time, the God of all eternity?

For the party of Antioch, there was a Messiah of two natures, one divine and one human. Such was the opinion of Theodore of Mopsueste (350–428), Theodoret of Cyrus, and Nestorius, patriarch of Constantinople. An error, retorted the party of Alexandria: to admit two natures was to recognize two Messiahs, two persons, one the eternal Logos, the other an historical individual. Monophysites, or the supporters of a single nature, thenceforth entered into the lists of those combatting the Antiochians or Dyophysites, who distinguished two natures.

Paradoxically, Monophysism derived from the hostility manifested towards Arius by Athanase of Alexandria, who insisted on the unique nature of the incarnated God-Logos. Around 370, Apollinaire of Laodicee (Latakiech, in Syria), desiring to pursue the struggle against Arianism, insisted on

Athanase's thesis and attracted the animosity of Epiphanius of Salamis, the hunter of heretics and the juridical enemy of Origen.

In 374, Epiphanius denounced Apollinaire to Damase, the Bishop of Rome: Apollinaire was condemned by a synod.

In 381, while the ecumenical council of Constantinople anathematized Arianism and Apollinaire's theses, an adversary of Apollinaire, the Antiochian Diodore of Tarse, took the position opposite to the incriminated doctrine and decreed that the most important thing about the Christ was his human nature, his suffering, his exemplary sacrifice. He counted two natures in this Messiah, tossed about, as pretext, from one camp to the other, on the waves of a theology of power: the Word [*Verbe*] or Logos, Son of God, and Jesus the man, son of Mary. Thus, Theodore of Mopsueste developed the theory of Diodore.

The difficulty in which were entangled the clerics trying to legitimate their authority by fortifying it with "divine truths" precisely concerned the way that they transformed into concrete realities the purely speculative reasons that Judeo-Christian Gnosticism had maintained at the very limits of coherence: a God who drew from his eternal essence a Logos (or image) of which the flash (or reflection) preserved its imprint in human matter. From this, divine Wisdom — Sophia or Mary, feminine Spirit — gave birth to — and always from the same virginal essence — a Messiah, a savior, a redeemer, who assumed the body of a man, and thereby knew the miserable lot of mortals and, through, his exemplary sacrifice, ascended towards his Father by showing mankind the road of salvation and the ascensional route of the divine that was inside it. What spoiled and complicated the metaphysical purity of such a construction was the will or the necessity of introducing a temporal power, a legal authority.

The apologue of Sophia, the virgin, and Prunikos, the prostitute, contented itself with allegorically expressing the descent of the Spirit into matter and the deplorable fate that imposed upon it the "malediction of the flesh." But the parthenogenesis of a young Jewish bride giving birth to a God after having welcomed a dove?!

In 423, when Theodose II named the Antiochian Nestorius to be the patriarch of Constantinople, popular Greek Christianity — dressed in the costume of the commonly invoked ancient Goddess — took up the custom of celebrating Mary as the mother of God. She was *Theotokos.* (In the Fourth and Fifth Centuries, the custom of offering cakes to Ceres became Christianized. One would call "Collyridians," from the Greek word *collyres,* "little cakes," the new Christians who gave to Mary offerings reserved for her archetype. Epiphanius would unleash his fury against them, no doubt due to ordinary misogyny, but also because he suspected that, under the Christian facade, the old fertility rites remained intact.)

Therefore Nestorius (381–451), the Bishop of Byzantium from 428–431, claimed for himself the Dyophysite school of Antioch. His disciples held him to be, along with Theodore of Mopsueste and Diodore of Tarse, among the "three great lights of the Church." His political realism incited him to follow the Antiochian tradition of historical exegesis, rather than the allegorical tradition of Alexandria. Nevertheless, he clashed with the general sentiment of the Greek Catholics by rejecting the expression "mother of God" (*Theotokos*) in favor of *Anthropotokos* or *Christotokos* (mother of Man or mother of the Christ).

Cyrille of Alexandria, adversary of Nestorius and partisan of Apollinaire of Laodicea, quickly counter-attacked: "If the Christ is God, and Mary is his mother, would she not be the mother of God?"

The emperor convened a council at Ephesus in 431. Through a manoeuvre that revealed the political obedience of theological argumentation, the partisans of Cyrille, arriving first, obtained the condemnation of Nestorius. As the *Theotokos,* the Mother of God, Mary triumphed. Nestorius was deposed.

Although a counter-council of the Nestorians replied by deposing Cyrille of Alexandria in 436, the patriach of Byzantium was banished to Petra, then in Upper Egypt, where he died. By imperial order, the ensemble of his works was burned. Nevertheless, a copy of his *Bazaar of Heraclides* escaped destruction. In it, he proclaimed that God could not have been born from a woman, nor that he died on the cross. This was a thesis commonly accepted by the Christian Gnostics of the Second Century and that the Church would condemn under the name "Docetism."

The fall of Nestorius involved that of the Dyophysites Diodore of Tarse and Theodore of Mopsueste, who — held as orthodox in their era — would be posthumously placed among the camp of the heretics. Nevertheless, Diodore deployed great ingenuity by explaining that, in Mary's uterus, the Logos built a temple for itself. This temple was Jesus the man, headed for birth and suffering, whereas the divine Logos, for its part, escaped from control by human destiny.

Likewise, Theodore insisted on the union in a single person of the nature of Man, complete in its humanity, and nature, perfect in its divinity, and the Logos-Son, consubstantial with the Father.

In 489, the school of Edessa, in which Nestorianism enjoyed a great popularity, fell under the prohibitions of Emperor Zenon. The persecution would hunt the Nestorians, whose Churches would spread everywhere in the East, Samarcande and Tartaria as far as India, even China. They have maintained themselves ever since by conserving, according to their dogma, the idea that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and not the Son, which is what the Byzantine Church affirmed. The West would only keep a trace of these doctrines, which were condemned under the name "Adoptianism," associated with Felix of Urgel and Elipand, the Bishop of Toledo, excommunicated by the Council of Frankfurt in the Eighth Century because they maintained that God had adopted Jesus the man so as to deposit his Logos in him.

* * *

In its desire to maintain the unity of a church of which it remained the true master, imperial power sought to reconcile the partisans of Cyrille and Nestorius in the first half of the Fifth Century.

Did not Eutyches, the Archimandrite of a monastery in Constantinople, try to rally these points of view in this formula: in Jesus there were two natures that only formed a single nature once the union with the Logos was accomplished?

In 451, Emperor Marcian convened a new council in Chalcedonia, not far from Byzantium. The decision was one person in two natures. Dismay of the Monophysites who were injured by the attribution [to Jesus] of two natures; displeasure of the Dyophysites for whom "one person" was unacceptable. In the scuffle [*la foule*], Eutyches was excluded. The Egyptians felt betrayed. They declared: "We would kill ourselves if we were to counter-sign the text of Leon" (the Bishop of Rome who seemed to have envisioned two natures in his *Tome*). "We would prefer to die in the hands of the emperor and the council."[301] Their prudence with respect to confronting their faithful was only too justified. Scarcely had the council deposed Diosoris, the Monophysite bishop of Alexandria, when his successor, Proterius, mandated by the council, was lynched by a mob.

The Monophysite schsim sent shock waves [*sillage*] through Egypt, half of Palestine, Syria, Ethiopia, the South of Araby, and Georgia, [thus] constituting an anti-Chalcedonian front of churches. The churches of Armenia, which were not represented at the council, mocked Monophysism until the Sixth Century.

[301] J.D. Mansi, *De sacrorum conciliorum novo collectio,* 1759, 7, 58–60.

There subsisted in the east a Chalcedonian party: the Melchites, professing opinions that were hostile to Monophysism, whom Emperor Justinian would try to reconcile with the Monophysites. After kidnapping Virgile, Bishop of Rome (or maybe pope, as some have called him since then), he kept him prisoner for seven years, until he detected a Monophysite "capitulation."

The half-Syrian Jacob Baradeus (500–578) would found new Monophysite churches all through the east. In Syria, those who kept his memory called themselves Jacobites. These were orthodox churches that hounded heretics, as everywhere else, with the help of their thinkers: Severe of Antioch, Jacob of Serug, Philoxene of Mabbourg, John of Tella and Theodore of Araby.

* * *

In the reverberations [*sillage*] of Monophysism were situated the sect of the *agNoahtes* or "ignorant," founded by Themistios, Deacon of Alexandria, who, preoccupied with the intellect of Jesus, established a distinction between the omniscience of God, which was in him, but in an unconscious state, and his comprehension, which hardly surpassed the understanding shared by humans. Carried along by rival powers, speculation gave given something piquant to the decision of the Council of Chalcedonia: two natures, but only one person in Jesus. But Themistios did not occupy a position in the Church worthy of the interest that satisfied the Monophysism of the Coptic Churches, thenceforth independent of the Archbishop of Rome (which became the papacy) and that, on the Byzantine side of things, assured a relative peace.

In a common accord, Euloge, Patriach of Alexandria (580–607), and Pope Gregoire I condemned Themistios.

The quarrel over the natures of the Christ would suggest to Julian, Bishop of Halicarnasse, the opinion that, Jesus not being entirely human, his body remained incorruptible and inaccessible to suffering. Combatted by the Monophysite Severe of Antioch, chased from his episcopal See and condemned with his partisans under the barbarous label *Aphthartodocetes,* he sought refuge in Alexandria in 518.[302]

A sectarian of Julian of Halicarnasse, Gaienus — inaugurated in 535 in place of the Severian Theodose — united his partisans, or "Gaianites," in a fashion in which he perpetuated the spirit of Paul of Samosate. Communion was given in his name, the women themselves baptized their children in the sea by invoking the name of Gaianus, who did not disdain from passing himself off as the "second Christ" and receiving Mass in person.[303]

[302]W.H.C. Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement,* Cambridge, 1972.

[303]J. Jarry, *Heresies et factions dans l'Empire byzantin du IV au VII siecle, op. cit.,* p. 82.

Chapter 23: Pelagius and Augustine, or the Conception of Free Will and Predestination

Thanks to the bias of Augustine of Hippone, who fought against it, the doctrine of Pelagius enriched the Catholic dogma, then in formation, with two specifications that were important to the power that they conferred upon the Church of Rome and to the incessant quarrels that it maintained over the course of the centuries.

Augustine did indeed mark the beginning of the requirement to baptize children, who were held to be impure at birth, and the advent of the theory of predestination — much later judged to be heretical, without triggering the impossible condemnation of one of the principal "fathers" of Catholicism — which he fabricated so as to direct it against his old enemy, Pelagius.

Pelagius (340?-429?), born in Britain or Ireland, no doubt retained traces of the Celtic freedom of spirit when he reached Rome around 400. A little before the fall and sacking of the city by the Goths, who were converted to Arianism (410), Pelagius and his disciple Celestius left for Carthage, where his brilliant spirit and rhetorical talents won him the friendship of Augustine of Hippone, bishop of the city. But Augustine's authoritarianism quickly ceased tolerating the uncertainties that Pelagius's ideas propagated concerning the function of the Church, over which the master of Carthage intended to establish absolute hegemony. (Augustine did not hesitate to retrieve from Tyconius, who was the partisan of a type of Donatism that he anathematized, the theory of a City of God that was superior to the terrestrial city, entrusted to this impermiable power, which was precisely in decline during the Roman Empire.)

Pelagius took refuge in Palestine, in which another doctrinaire Catholic, Jerome — put on his guard by Augustine's emissaries — persecuted him and taxed his doctrine with Manicheanism, Catholicism's religious rival, repressed everywhere with the greatest violence. (Augustine himself was a renegade from Manicheanism. He turned his vehemence against his old co-religionists by appealing to them to abide by the rigors of the law. It was from him that came the bloody repression that struck the Manicheans and, much later, the Paulicians, the Bogomiles and the Cathars.)

Acquitted by the Synod of Jerusalem in 415, Pelagius and Celestius were excommunicated two years later by Pope Innocent I. At first, Zozime, Innocent's successor, showed sympathy towards Pelagius, but he soon pulled himself together and definitively condemned him at the Council of Carthage in 418.

To better understand Pelagius's teachings and Augustine's attitude, it is fitting to situate them within the anti-Montanist reaction that was conducted with firmness by the "lax" politics of the ecclesiastical majority in the West.

If the Church reconciled itself with Greco-Roman hedonism by exiling puritan rigor to the monasteries, if it kept the sacrifical perfection of the Christ as a difficultly accessible ideal, it also acquiesed without too much difficulty to the depraved morals of many priests and faithful people, provided that its authority and sacramental function was publicly privileged.

The Spirituals or "Messalians" weren't the only ones to turn aside the duplicity of the Church and cover, with several hastily Christianized arguments, their quite common choice to obey sexual impulses and the pleasures of existence, without preoccupying themselves with obedience or guilt.

Around 380, a certain Helvidius, apparently a disciple of Auxentius (the Arian Bishop of Milan and the predecessor of Ambroise), drew down upon himself the thunderbolts of Jerome (344?-420) for having mocked the virginity of Mary and maintained that she had had other children, since the canonical gospels mention the "brothers of the Lord." With fervor Jerome tried to show that these brothers were merely Jesus' cousins. He was way too attached to the word "brother," which — in the spirit of Essenism or Nazareanism — was identical to "witness," to *martus* in Greek and "martyr" in French;[304] for the Judeo-Christians, the brother or witness was simply he who participates in the same sacrifice as the "Servant of the Lord," celebrated by the *Book of Isaiah.*

But Helvidius' remark is less concerned with promoting historical exegesis than finishing with the alleged superiority of virginity over the amorous relation. This was why he rejected Tertullian, Montan and all of the Christianity of the New Prophecy.

A similar doctrine can be found in Jovianian, a disciple of Ambroise, Bishop of Milan. In Rome, where his audience was large, Jovinian argued ironically that such a virgin birth was accomplished by this fantastic being named Jesus, this *angelos-christos* that the Gnostics and Manicheans condemned by the Church were so proud of. To the hypocritical asceticism of the faithful, Jovinian opposed the salvational inclination to the pleasures of the table, love and the benefits of life, which were real grace accorded by divine kindness. For him, the purification of baptism was sufficient to wash away all sin and to protect oneself against the traps set by a demon anxious to spoil and corrupt the gifts of God…

Condemned by Pope Sirice and by the Council of Milan, convened in 390 at the request of Ambroise, Jovinian was exiled by imperial prescription.

Among the most persistent of Jovinian's adversaries were Jerome, the supporter of marital viginity and author of *Against Jovinian,* the no-less misogynist Augustine, and Pelagius.

What divergence separated Pelagius from the puritan Augustine? A certain concept of human dignity. Pelagius did not share in the conception of a fundamental ignominy of mankind, which the Bishop of Carthage had brilliantly summarized in this finding: "*Inter fesces et urinam nascimur,*" "We are born between shit and piss."

The austerity of Pelagius was related to that Seneca and even to that of the Nineteenth Century atheistic moralists, nay, even the freethinkers who [today] thrash the debauchery of the clergy. Pelagius estimated that mankind makes use of a force of will that was sufficient to attain virtue and goodness. There was no need for divine aid or the mediation of the Church if one wished to follow the ethical rules that were prescribed everywhere. All virtues resides in germ-form in each individual; it was sufficient to bring these seeds to fruition if one wished to fight the temptations of evil.

One could not trace the roads of public morality any better by avoiding the detour of the Church.

The Church [according to Pilage], reduced to a congruous portion, only intervened through the sacraments, so as to guarantee the salvation of the soul when terrestrial life accomplished its destiny according to the precepts of moral law.

Our freedom was as total as that of Adam and Eve, before they misused it, thereby condemning themselves to downfall. By teaching the privileges of moral will from infancy, men would obey God's designs, and baptism (which was not given to children at the time) simply placed the Church's seal as a pass to eternal beautitude.

[304] *Translator's note*: and in English as well.

Many citizens of the Empire — including those who prized moral rigor or Stoic or Epicurean philosophy — practiced such principles without needing to give them a Christian coloration. Even among the Catholics, Theophrone of Cappadoccia said that the omniscience of God knew all that would be produced, but did not positively know it as an accomplished fact, [thus] leaving to mankind the freedom to act beyond all determinations. In the spirit of Theophrone, it was a question of reconciling the absolute power of God and human freedom, which the Church, called upon to get out of the dead-end of Augustinian predestination, would call "free will."

And so, at the time that Pelagius was recalling the principles of a lay morality, Augustine (calculating the decline of imperial unity and his stranglehold over the West) prepared for the advent of a pontifical authority that would cover the entire world with traps, the tangled stitches of which the City of God and the terrestrial city would [combine to] ceaselessly tighten.

Augustine launched a machine of doctrinal war against Pelagius. To the freedom defended by his adversary, Augustine opposed a theory that, much later, would be regurgitated by Calvinism and Jansenism: predestination.

The fate of mankind was traced out in all eternity by God who, as absolute master, decided upon the salvation or damnation of his creatures. A terrible doctrine, which, setting human beings to fear and trembling, reduced their pride, abandonned them pantingly to the consolations of a Church that recalled their indignity to them.

To break the Pelagians' excessive confidence in mankind, Pope Honorius subjected them, and the philosopher Julian of Eclane, to the penalties prescribed for heretics. Pelagius and Celestius died in exile, one believes, shortly thereafter.

Predestination also revealed a banality that was even more embarrassing to the Church than the freedom left in mankind's own hands. If the fate of each being was determined according to the caprice of God, what good were the protections of the Church, the priests and the sacraments? It would take Thomas Aquinas' laborious arguments to accord to the all-powerful divinity the freedom to choose salvation or damnation in a conscious and willful manner called "free will."

Augustine never incurred the least reprobation; he had done too much for the grandeur and enrichment of the Church. But, in 475, the Council of Arles would condemn as a heretic one Lucida, who supported the idea that, the freedom of mankind having been annihilated by the fall into sin, each person fell under the blow of a predestination required by God and by virtue of which destiny led each, irremediably, to damnation or eternal life.

The amplified function of original sin and the impurity imputed to new-born infants gave the [Church's] dogma a response that aimed at annihilating the hopes that Pelagius had in rendering mankind perfect. The Montanists, in their horror of nature and life (although such a repulsion had already animated Essene zeal), were the first to recommend the baptism of infants, at a time when the custom was not widespread. Augustine held up to mankind, capable of raising itself towards virtue (so says Pelagius), an inverse portrait: man was a wretched creature, imbecilic, prey to all temptations of the flesh and quite incapable of resisting them. Why? Because the original stain of the sin of Adam penetrates him from his birth. Only baptism washed him of the infamy that the Church tolerates only when it welcomed the faithful into its sanctuary.

Once the baptism of children was erected as a necessity, the new-born was consecrated to the Catholic faith from the very first hours of its life. Unbaptized children would die like animals; the others would live in repudiated errors and innocence. The profitable market in pentitence and redemption — gifts, emoluments, alms, submission — took root in the Augustinian doctrine of the intrinsic weakness of the body and the spirit.

No one had the force of character great enough to successfully resist all temptation. One sinned by pride if one estimated oneself able to thwart [all] the demoniac ruses of nature. So! Man, this miserable and negligible being, succumbed to sin — because Rome authorized him to redeem himself, to regain his salvation, not in the ways [*le chef*] of Augustine, but in the comforting bosom of the Church. Much later, the skillful arrangement of responsibilities and free will would establish a mathematics of salvation and damnation that would open on to the trade in indulgences and absolutions at a price.

The credit of Augustine in the matter was merited, as long as one excused his doctrinal lapses into the black ride of predestination.

Chapter 24: Priscillian of Avila

Among the letters falsely attributed to Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage (executed in 258), there is one — emanating from Novatian's partisans, that is to say, from the Christians loyal to the New Prophecy and hostile to the *lapsi* — that attests to the presence in Spain of Christian communities of the Montanist tendency, the ardor of which Novatian had revived in the fire of imperial persecution.

In 254, an African council convened under the aegis of Cyprian provided his support to the Novatians who, in Lerida, Leon and Astorga, rejected the ministers suspected of abjuration during Dece's repressions.

Thus, with the Constantinian turn, the Catholic ecclesiatical faction that acceded to power recognized everywhere the authority of the perjured priests and collaborators. (See the example of Bishop Cecilian, enemy of Donat in Carthage.) A Century later, Bishop Pacianus of Barcelona denounced penitential discipline and the rigor of the priest or bishop named Sympronianus.[305]

Priscillian's intervention inscribed itself in the persistance of a Christian tradition with which Catholicism confirmed its break by reason of its political aims. His execution drew a bloody stroke across archaic Christianity sacrificed to national security [*la raison d'Etat*].

Through the argument without reply of the sword, Catholicism cut itself off from a Christianity that would not cease to haunt it during the long funeral procession of the Vaudois, apostolics, Flagellants, [and] Spiritual Franciscans, right up to the emergence of a Reformation in which the spirit of Montan and Tertullian would be reincarnated in the founding fathers of modern capitalism.

Born around 340 to a well-to-do and probably senatorial Roman family, Priscillian was in his thirties when he adhered to the Christian current that was traditionally ascetic, millenarianist and on the lookout for the second coming of the Christ.

Priscillian soon clashed with the representatives of Rome and the new tendency. Among the clerical functionaries of the emperor, two dignitaries — Ithacius, Bishop of Ossonuba (Faro) and his Metropolite, Hydatius of Emerita Augusta (Merida) — accused Priscillian of imposing on his faithful an oath of loyalty to him. He inflamed the Council of Saragossa, which in 380 convened twenty-six bishops from Spain and Portugal, and two from South Gaul. What was the exact accusation? That Priscillian, well versed in biblical exgeses, referred to texts other than the canonical ones, which had only been recently imposed. But the progress of Manicheanism, the great competiting religion, offered the "Romans" the occasion to appeal to the amalgam, which was the ordinary ingredient of such polemics. Priscillian, a perfect ascetic, declared himself favorable to celibacy for priests. It was no longer necessary to assimilate him with the disciples of Mani, against whom the neo-Novatians had, all things considered, never ceased to struggle.

That same year, Priscillian was elected Bishop of Avila. This angered Hydatius, who obtained, one after the other, the support of Ambroise, Bishop of Milan and a future saint, and an imperial rescrit that ordered the deposition of Priscillian and the banishment of the "pseudo-Bishops and Manicheans."

[305] H. Chadwick, *Priscillian of Avila: The Occult and the Charismatic in the Early Church,* Oxford, 1976.

Soon afterwards, Priscillian, two bishop friends and three women from his congregation went to Rome via the [province of] Aquitaine, so as to plead their case and prove their religious orthodoxy. They expressed the wish to be judged, not by a civil tribunal, but an ecclesiastical proceeding. In Milan, Ambroise refused to give them an audience. Addressing themselves to Macedonius, Ambroise's adversary, they managed — through an intermediary — to join with Emperor Gratian, who was originally from Spain and who was convinced by their arguments, and so restored their See to Priscillian and his friend, Bishop Instantius.

Ithacius reacted by winning over Treves, where he reported the affair to Gratian. But, in August 380, Gratian was assassinated by a rival, another Spaniard, Magnus Maximus, who was acclaimed "Augustus," although legitimate recognition of him was refused, which abandoned him to the uncertainties of usurpation.

Pressed by the desire to reconcile the sympathies of a unitary and Roman Church, Magnus Maximus took hold of the trial like it was a political tool and convened a synod in Bordeaux so as to settle the question by a veritable pontifical sovereignty. His hatred of Gratian enjoined him to demonstrate that, contrary to his predecessor, he would tolerate neither polytheism nor heresy. Priscillian, summoned to Treves with his friends, confronted the bishops of Spain and Gaul, who had been informed of the decisions of Maxime [Maximus?] beforehand.

With the exception (one says) of Martin of Tours, all condemned the Bishop of Avila, who — in his combat against the Manicheans — had reproached them for their recourse to magic and was now [in his turn] accused of Manicheanism and sorcery. Tortured, he confessed his magical powers, his role in demonaic meetings, and his custom of praying while nude. The repressive tradition of the Church would attempt to identify in the popular imagination Manicheanism and, much later, Valdeism, with rites of sorcery that easily ignited the pyres of fear and hatred.

The iniquity of the trial of Priscillian aroused the reprobation of Martin of Tours and perhaps that of Sirice, whose timid power aspired to the recognition of a pontifical title. A second chance given to Priscillian was abruptly ended by the decapitation of six people charged with "magic and immorality" in Treves between 385 and 387. Received with indignation by the Christian communities, the news suggested to Ambroise of Milan a few late regrets. The remains of Priscillian, repatriated to Gaul around 396, were the object of the veneration reserved for martyrs of the faith.

As the death of their leader did not weaken the Priscillians, Emperor Honorius would issue the rescrit of 408 against them. In 561 or 563, the Council of Braga would judge it useful to anathematize seventeen "errors" imputed to Priscillian.

It is difficult to disentangle the Priscillian doctrine from the calumnies that the Church has mixed into it over the centuries. Its basis derived from a Christianity that was dominant from the second half of the Second Century to the end of the Fourth Century, and that the Church later condemned under the names Montanism, Encratism, Novatianism and Origenism. Thus Priscillianism was unacquainted with the compiled gospels, which had been canonically enriched by arguments hostile to Arius and ascetic rigor. Priscillianism regrouped clerics and lay people in assemblies in which asceticism (and thus the cult of virginity) were exalted. If one can judge from the similar state of the Pietist congregations of the Seventeenth Century, it is probable that ecstasies, illuminations, prophetism and other forms of religious hysteria common to Puritanism were manifested in Priscillianism.

The trinitary conception of Nicaea had not reached Spain, nor the popular strata of Christianity. "Long after Nicaea, a very archaic view and an experience similar to the Trinity continued to be dominant."[306]

According to Priscillian, Christian asceticism participated in the presence of the God-Christ. As in the prescription of Tertullian, one dreamed of exhausting the body so as to make the Spirit grow within it. As with Justin arguing against Tryphon, the Christ was nothing other than the divine Logos. The presence of God resulted more from a personal experience than rational reflection. Revelation in itself of the God-Christ permitted mankind to attain the state of perfection through the exercise of rigor. And Priscillian spoke of a *nova nativitas,* a new birth. Was it not his heritage that would welcome Spanish Catholicism, which — from Dominique to Queipo of Llano, passing through Ignacius and Loyola, and [possibly due to] *genius loci* [spirit of place], Theresa of Avila — furbished the weapons against life known as *Viva la muerte*[307] and *Perinde ac cadaver*?[308]

Is it necessary to exclude the recourse to astrology, if not magic, from a teaching that was founded on the imitation of the Christ and that conferred "*quies, libertas, unitas*"?[309] "The Priscillianist heretics," Pope Gregoire affirmed, "think that all men are born under a conjunction of stars. And, to help their error, they appeal to the fact that a new star appeared when Our Lord showed himself in the flesh."[310] Perhaps the notion of a new birth gave way to the astrological speculations that were similar to those made by Bardesanes of Edessa. As for magic, its practice was fairly widespread in the Christian milieux, as is attested by the abraxas or talismans on which the Christ replaced Seth, Ophis, Mithra, Serapis and Abrasax. The cult of the saints itself was helped by the invocations in which the sign of the cross was substituted for the song of the [seven] vowels and for gestures that translated diverse expressions.

To recognize in Priscillian the first victim of [Catholic] orthodoxy and the [universal] jurisdiction adopted in matters of heresy (and this is the way that the historians have seen him) would be to forget the massacre of the Arians and the Donatists. The novelty of Priscillian resided rather in the iniquity of the trial and in the arguments made against the accused. At Treves, the curtain was *de facto* raised on a long series of stagings in which the accused, condemned in advance by the judgment of the Church, entered (under the parodic sign of justice) into the circle of fire of expiatory sacrifice, by which the clergy imposed the dogma of its purity and its divine power upon the sinners.

[306] A.J.M. Goosen, *Achtergronden van Priscillianus' christelijike ascese,* Nimegue, 1976, p. 401.
[307] *Translator's note*: "Long live death" was the slogan of the Spanish fascists in the 1930s.
[308] *Translator's note*: Latin for "corpse or cadaver," a slogan of Ignacius.
[309] *Translator's note*: Latin for "rest, freedom, unity."
[310] Gregoire the Great, cited in *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de geographie ecclesiastique* (Priscillian).

Chapter 25: Paulicians and Bogomiles

The Paulicians

In the Fourth Century, Armenian Christianity offered to their neighborhoring particularities the same landscape as that of the cities of Latium and Greece, if not the entire Empire: an ancient Christianity of an ascetic spirit, a pro-Roman clerical party that was better and better structured, Marcionite communities, local churches like founded by Paul of Samosate, and archaic cults either Christianized or including the Christ in their ecumenicism: Naassenes, Barbelites, Sethians, Valentinians, and sometimes all of these beliefs confounded together. (Contrary to what the majority of historians affirm, and as the sepulcher of the Aurelii shows.)

In Armenia, the pro-Roman faction tried to free itself from Montanist Christianity, Marcionite churches and the schools of Bardesane. Epiphanius, responsible for keeping track of the resistance movements for Roman Catholicism, mentioned a sect founded by a certain Peter of Kapharbarucha, which he designated "Archontics," the doctrine of which was propagated by Eutacte of Satala. It syncretically picked out ideas from Marcionism and Barbelism. From Marcion it took his anti-Semitism and the dualism according to which the Demiurge, creator of an odious universe, was none other than Sabaoth, God of the Jews, who resided in the seventh heaven and governed the Hebdomade. [As for the influence of the Barbelites:] for the soul to rejoin its original Mother, it must elevate itself to the eighth heaven (Ogdoade). One is unfamiliar with the type of ecstatic practice that the union established with the adept, which was no doubt introduced with the help of incantations, so as to avoid the traps set by the henchmen of the abominable Sabaoth.[311] The Archontics did not care to practice baptism or the sacraments.

In 325, the monarchs embraced Catholicism due to complacency and diplomatically imposed it on their subjects. The Roman clerical faction thus took hold of the key posts and repressed all of the isolated pockets of resistance, which were quickly indexed in the catalogues of heresies, the descriptive files that inquisitorial police officers would use until the Eighteenth Century.

The Paulicians, who appeared in the middle of the Seventh Century in Armenia, seemed to have come from Samosate, from which they were chased by persecution. Fleeing Armenia and the combined zeal of the Church and the princes, they found refuge near Coloneia, under the suzerainty of the Arab calif. In fact, a little before 630, the Arabs had seized the Byzantine provinces of North Africa, Egypt, Palestine and Syria; they then threatened Byzantium, which was torn by internal struggles.

Although Peter of Sicily had tried to recommence the movement of Paul of Samosate, it is more credible to associate the Paulicians with Paul the Armenian who, from 699 to 718, consolidated it.

Dualists, the Paulicians did not adhere to the Manichean religion. Instead, their doctrine restored an archaic Gnostic Christianity, adapted to the Paulicians' status as an embattled minority.

Peasants grouped in "free" agrarian communities, (*) the Paulicians became soldiers to resist any power that intended to feudalize them into tutelage. A good God supported their faith; the other, the

[311] Epiphanius, *Panarion,* I, 3.

God of Evil, was identified with Byzantine authority, which was intent on annihilating them. They did not bother with the sacraments, knew neither baptism, communion, penitence, nor marriage. They rejected fasting and Catholicism's feast days. They execrated the cross, an instrument of punishment and death, and the cult of the saints and the icons, which perpetuated superstitious practices.

(*) The Paulician communalist model played a role in the peasant revolts in Asia Minor (820–824), which were led by Thomas the Slav.

The Paulicians' Jesus was the *angelos-christos.* In the Old Testament they saw the work of the Demiurge. As for priests, they judged them to be useless, harmful and corrupt, and would not fail to kill them if the occasion presented itself.

They allowed no clergy, but accorded their trust to pastors tasked with preaching and to the *didachoi* or teachers who explained the sacred texts. Without tipping over into Marcion's asceticism, the Paulicians were related to his type of primitive Christianity, which venerated the Apostle Paul and took exception to the authority of Peter.

The Paulicians began to be persecuted after their installation in Coloneia, where the bishop decimated them with the consent of the emperor. The first leader of their community, the Armenian Constantine, died at the stake in 682. His successor, Simeon, experienced the same fate in 688. But the Paulicians found among the Arabs a tolerance that was cruelly absent from the Catholics. Under the influence of Paul the Armenian, their doctrine — until then a form of Christianity that was common in 140 (except for baptism, which they refused, perhaps tardily) — took on a coloration that was more clearly hostile to the clergy and Catholicism.

Thereafter, their history is confounded with the atrocious war that Byzantium fought against them.

Ravaged by the conflict concerning the icons (726 to 843), the Empire turned its rage from away the Paulicians, so as to invest it in hostile factions, which the quarrel about the icons would set against each other. (The quarrel about these images only inflamed the endemic social war in which two factions confronted each other: the Blues, of aristocratic tendency, and the Greens, artisans mostly, often favorable to heterodoxy.)

In the spirit of Nestorius, the iconoclasts did not tolerate the figuration of the principle divinities but, unlike the Paulicians, they venerated the cross and nourished no sympathy for the signs of heresy. Moreover, the worst persecution took place on the initiative of the iconoclast Leon V (813–823). It continued under Theodora, who reestablished the cult of images.

Exterminated in Byzantium, the Paulicians asked for the help of the Arab emirs. Some of them sent the Islamic troops that harassed the imperial city. In 843, a punitive expedition from Byzantium triggered the rebellion of an officer named Corbeas, whose father, a Paulician, was impaled. He led a group of 5,000 men and founded an independent state in Temphric, where he made use of the benevolent aid of the emirs of Melitene and Tarse.

With his militia of soldier-peasants, Corbeas broke the offensive launched in 865 by Petrones, brother of the Empress Theodora. Two years later, he beat the army of Michel III. In 860, raids against Nicaea and Ephesus attested to the power of Tephric. Killed in battle in 863, Corbeas was replaced by Chrisocheir, formerly denounced by the patriach and heresiologue Photius.

The intervention of an embassador, Peter of Sicily, who had been sent among the Paulicians, was less an attempt at reconciliation than a spy mission, because, if Basile the First was defeated by Tephric in 870 or 871, the assassination by treachery of Chrisocheir in 872 caused the end of Tephric, which was sacked by Byzantium. The priests — inquisitors long before there was an Inquisition — organized the systematic massacre of the Paulicians, men, women and children. The escapees took refuge in the Balkans and Thrace, where Alexis Comnene would undertake to reduce them between 1081 and 1118.

In the Arab armies that seized Constantinople in 1453, there were Paulician Christians whose hatred of the oppressive Empire had fed the spirit of vengeance.

In 1717, in Philippopolis, there still existed a Christian community that venerated the Apostle Paul and refused to recognize the authority of Rome due to their hostility to the orthodox Church. Such believers exist today under the name "Uniats."

The Bogomiles

"During the reign of the very-Christian Peter, there appeared on Bulgarian soil a priest named Bogomile (he who loves God); in truth, he called himself Bogunemil (he who is not loved by God). He was the first to propagate the heresy on Bulgarian soil." Thus began the *Treatise Against the Heretics, by the Unworthy Cosmas the Priest,* a precious source of information about the movement that carried the name of its founder.

He who, with a complacent servility, called himself "unworthy priest" seized upon a letter sent by Theophyacte, patriach of Byzantium, to King Peter of Bulgaria (who died 969); in this letter the representatives "of a resurgent ancient heresy, a Manicheanism mixed with Paulicianism"[312] were anathematized.

In its specificity, and without precisely relying upon the Manichean religion, Bogomilism played the role of link between the Paulician communities, distant inheritors of Marcion and the Catharian beliefs that, starting in the Sixth Century, reached the Rhine Valley, Cologne, Flanders, Champagne, Northern Italy and Provence.

Initially governed by a landed, Boyar aristocracy and founded upon the Slavic rural commune, Bulgaria became feudalized in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries. Under the influence of the neighboring Byzantine Empire, its princes adopted Catholicism and, as elsewhere, imposed it on their subjects. Nothing is more false than the idea that there was a spontaneous conversion of the people to the doctrine of Rome and Byzantium. The Nazarene, Elchasaite, Marcionite, Valentinian, Montanist and Tertullianist Christianities inspired the adhesion of a growing number of the faithful; Catholicism was always propagated by the high [and mighty] on the persuasive point of a temporal sword. From 325 on, Catholicism ceased to be Christian, as Christianity ceased to be Jewish after 135. And, with greater rigor than the Jews did, Catholicism would deal with the adepts of Valdes' voluntary poverty, with Michel of Cezene, with the apostolics who dreamed of reviving the Christianity of the New Prophecy, and with the reformers who, taking up the slack of the abhorred Church, would in their turn justify the massacre of the Anabaptists and the dissidents.

Colonized by the Byzantine clergy, Bulgaria was covered with monasteries and aimed to rid the peasantry of a "monastic vermin" that subsisted on the work of rural communities.

Bogomile's doctrine did not bother with Manichean complexities. It professed a moderate dualism, in conformity with the antagonism of forces and the [political] interests under consideration.

God created the universe, that is to say, the seven heavens and the four elements (fire, air, water and earth). God, the resurgence of the plural God Elohim, reigned harmoniously over a cohort of angels, when one of them, Satanael, rebeled and was thrown to earth, which he separated from the water, thus creating — under the essentially divine light of the sun — the material universe and mankind. Nevertheless, Satanael included in the human body an angelic fragment, with the result that the duality of good and evil was incarnated in each person.

[312] B. Primov, *Les Bougres: Histoire du pope Bogomile et de ses adeptes,* Paris, 1975, p. 97.

To aid humanity, God sent the angel Christ — still the *angelos-christos.* Satanael ordered that he be crucified, but the Messiah resuscitated, confounded his adversary and sent him to hell, thus exiling him from earth, which he would ceaselessly try to reconquer so as to finish his malevolent work. Thus Satanael had allies, all disposed towards restoring him to his privileges: kings, priests, the rich and the Church. Thus Bogomilism rediscovered in dualism the subversive ferment that had been propagated by the Paulicians, who were also attached to the independence and autarky of rural communities.

Hostile to the frequentation of churches, the Bogomiles called Saint Sophia the residence of demons. They mocked baptism: if water possessed such power, they remarked, then all of the animals, and especially the fish, were baptized. The rites of bread and wine were an absurd symbolism.

Without tilting into the excess of asceticism, the Bogomiles disapproved of the dissolute existence of the priests who summoned them to sanctify their souls, as Cosmas reported: "If you are saints, as you claim, why do you not live the life that Paul described to Timothy? The bishop must not have the least vice; he must marry only one woman; he must be sober, honest, correct and welcoming; he must be neither a drinker nor a quarreler, but a pleasing person who manages his house well. These priests are the inverse. They get inebriated; they steal; they give themselves up to vice in secret and there are no means to prevent them from doing so."[313]

And Cosmas specified that, "the Bogomiles denigrate the rich; they teach their own not to submit to lords and to execrate the king. They spit upon the figure of the notables and disapprove of the Boyars and think that God shows hatred for all of those who serve the King and they teach all the serfs not to work for their lords."[314] (To which Cosmas retorted: "All men must submit to the powers. It is not from the lords that God comes.")

Like the Paulicians, the Bogomiles mocked the saints, the icons and the relics, which were sources of profitable commerce. In the cross they saw a simple piece of wood that they called "the enemy of God." To them the miracles of the Christ were fables that had to be interpreted symbolically. (In the Seventeenth Century, the Englishman Thomas Woolston would die in prison for supporting this very thesis.)

Rejecting the Old Testament, which was the work of Satanael, the Bogomiles preferred a version of the *Gospel attributed to John,* in its ancient form as a Gnostic text.

The old Gnosticism also put its seal on the Bogomiles' two-tiered organization: the Perfect Ones, or Christians, who were the active and intellectual kernel (those who save), and the believers, who were peasants and bourgeois for whom *pistis* sufficed.

The Bogomiles named *consolamentum* a form of sacrament through which the neophyte acceded to the staus of perfection by having the *Gospel attributed to John* placed on his head as a sign of the assembly's acquiescence.

The Perfect Ones ate no meat, preached, did not work, and received no tithes. All of the believers received the *consolamentum* on their death-bed or at an advanced age.

Who was Bogomile? A Macedonian priest who was initially loyal to the Church of Byzantium and Rome. Revolted by the situation of the peasants, who were victims of war, the Boyars and the clergy, he broke with Catholicism and preached in the region of Skopje and in Thrace.

[313]M. Erbstoesser, *Les Heretiques au Moyen Age,* Leipzig, pp. 51 and 52.

[314]B. Primov, *op. cit.,* p. 120.

Cosmas contrasted Bogomile with the official doctrine: "The priests of the true faith, even if they are lazy, do not offend God," and "It is ordered that you honor the officials, even if they are bad [...] The men of the Church are always consecrated by God."[315]

Cosmas furnished a simple and ecumenically convincing explanation for the miseries of the world that satisfied or would satisfy the Hebrew religion, the papacy and Calvin: "Each of us must ask ourselves [...] if this is not why God put war on the earth."[316] Such was not the opinion of Bogomile and his partisans, who were more and more numerous.

Events provided Bogomilism with a foundation that wasn't only social, but national, as well, because, in 1018, Emperor Basile II put an end to the existence of the Bulgarian kingdom and crushed the nation under the yoke of Byzantine authority. Under the cover of the peasant uprisings, to which the nobility and the towns now gave their aid, the Bogomile influence polarized the resistance to the Empire; it invaded the cities, crossed the frontiers and reached Byzantium, despite constant and cruel persecution.

Euthyme of Acmone, who pursued the Bogomiles with a completely clerical hatred, called them *fundaiagites,* that is, "carriers of the double-sack," "truly impious people who in secret serve the devil."[317] Euthyme's diatribes still nourished the zeal of the persecutor Alexis Comnene in the Twelfth Century.

In the Twelfth Century, the Bogomile movement was implanted in Byzantium. Anne Comnene, daughter of the emperor, left a recital that was edified by the manner in which one of the city's Perfect Ones was captured and put to death in 1111:

> A certain monk by the name of Basile excelled in the teaching of the heresy of the Bogomiles. He had twelve students whom he called his apostles, having attracted several converts, who were perverted women living bad lives that spread evil everywhere. The evil ravaged many souls with the rapidity of fire.
>
> Certain Bogomiles were led to the palace and everything indicated that Basile was their master and the leader of the heresy. One among them, by the name of Divlati, was put in prison and interrogated so as to denounced them; at first, he did not consent to do so, but, after having been subjected to torture, he denounced Basile and the apostles that he had chosen. Then the Emperor sent many people to find him. And one [of them] discovered Satan's Archisatrape, Basile, a man in a monk's habit, with an emaciated face, without beard or moustache, very tall, an expert in the art of teaching heresy.
>
> The Emperor, wishing to learn the secret mystery from him, invited Basile under a special pretext. He descended from his throne to go meet Basile, invited him to his own table, held out to him all of the sinner's snares, and baited his fishing-hook so that it would catch this monstrous omnivore. Many times tempering his hatred and disgust for the monk, the Emperor weighed Basile down with flattery and he feigned to want to become Basile's student and, not only he, but his brother, Isaac, as well; the Emperor affected to recognize divine revelation in each of Basile's words and submitted himself to Basile in all things, on the condition that the wicked Basile would implore the salvation of his soul... And Basile then unveiled all of the heresy's doctrines. But what made him do this?

[315] *Ibid.,* p. 100.
[316] *Ibid.*
[317] *Ibid.,* p. 157.

> The Emperor had previously ordered that a curtain be installed in the corridor between the part reserved for the women and the spot in which he found himself [alone] with the demon, so that Basile would unmask himself before everyone and reveal everything that he had been hiding in his soul. Hidden behind the curtain, one of the clerics would write down everything that was said. Suspecting nothing, this imbecile [Basile] began to preach, the Emperor played the student, and the cleric wrote down 'the teachings' … But what happened then?
>
> The Emperor drew back the curtain and snatched away his mask. He then convened the Church's entire synod, all of the military leaders and the entire senate. An assembly was convoked, presided over by the venerated patriach of the imperial city, Nicolas Gramatik. In front of everyone, the diabolical doctrine was read aloud, and it was impossible to deny the accusations. The leader of the accused would not renounce his ideas and soon defended them openly. He declared that he was ready for the flames, to submit to the punishment of the whip and to experience a thousand deaths…
>
> Basile, a veritable heretic, refused to repent. This was why the members of the holy synod, the most worthy monks and Nicolas himself decided that Basile deserved to be burned alive. The Emperor, who had often spoken with Basile and was convinced that he was of bad faith and would never deny his heresy, adopted this opinion [openly]. The order was given to erect a large pyre in the Hippodrome. A deep pit was dug and very tall tree trunks were piled into it and then covered with leaves, one might say [making] a thick forest. When the pyre was lit, an immense crowd entered the Hippodrome and sat on the tiers, impatient for the events to begin. The following day, a cross was erected so that the impure one had the possibility — if he feared the flames — to deny his heresy and lead himself towards the cross. In the audience there were a great number of heretics who came to watch their leader Basile…
>
> The excited crowd gave him the opportunity to catch a glimpse of the horrible spectacle that the pyre presented; he felt the heat of the fire and saw the flames that crackled, which rose like tongues of fire up to the top of the granite obelisk that was erected in the middle of the Hippodrome.
>
> This spectacle did not make Basile hesitate; he remained inflexible. The fire had not yet melted his iron will, no more than the Emperor's promises did… .
>
> Then the executioners seized Basile by his clothes, raised him up high and then threw him, completely clothed, into the pyre. The flames, which became furious (one says), swallowed the impure one without releasing any odor; the smoke remained the same [color], there only appeared in the smoke a white ray among the flames. This is how they stood up to the impious.[318]

The execution of Basile and a great number of his partisans did not hinder the progress of Bogomilism. In 1167, another Perfect One left Byzantium for Italy and France, so as to unite assemblies: the West would come to know him as "Pope Nikta."

Despite the extermination-politics of the Serbian and Bosnian prines, the missionary activity of Bogomilism did not stop multiplying its churches: the Bulgarian Church, the Church of Dragovjit

[318] *Ibid.,* pp. 162–164.

(Thrace), the Greek Church, the Patarene Church (Bosnia), the Church of Philadelphia (Serbia). Bogomilism would find popular support among those who reacted against Rome's prohibition of the use of autochtonic languages in the liturgy, but also among fighters for independence.

The Bosnian Church, for a time recognized by the princes, was subjected to new persecutions from 1443 to 1461, and due to its hatred of Catholicism, would willingly turn towards the Turks. "This was why, when Bosnia fell under Ottoman domination, a great number of its inhabitants adopted the Muslim religion."[319]

Meanwhile, the Bulgarian adepts, called "Bulgari" [*bougres*], tried to instaurate — in opposition to Rome — impossible peaceful communities, fraternal and little inclined to martyrdom, from Milan to Languedoc, and from Cologne to Flanders and Orleans.

[319] *Ibid.,* p. 180.

Chapter 26: Christs and Reformers: Popular Resistance to the Institutional Church

By confirming the personal and temporal authority of the lax priests, bishops and collaborators, against whom Tertullian, Hippolyte, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Novatian, Donat and those faithful to popular Christianity had rebelled, the Church loosed upon the world — with the mission of circumventing kings, lords and worldly owners — a horde of clerics who were most often avid and unscrupulous.

The intention of Gregoire of Tours' *Historia Francorum* was to draft an devastating affidavit concerning clerical morals in Sixth Century Gaul. With rare exceptions, the men in question were merely debauched parish priests and dignitaries, looters and murderers — rivals in violence and deception with the masters of the earth — who attempted the extract the greatest possible profit from the peasants and artisans. While the purely formal reprobation of the Bishop of Tours relieved his own bad conscience — for pages he deplored the fact that conditions had not permitted him to remedy a state of affairs that he condemned from the depths of his heart — , the lay people, the monks and the priests who, sensitive to the misery of their parishioners, invested themselves in a sacred mission, of which the Church showed itself (in their eyes) to be unworthy. Their intention would end up inspiring in Rome (but only in the course of the Sixth Century) a reformist politics, the goals of which — to suppress the sale of the sacraments and the purchase of ecclesiastical offices, and to constrain the priests to celibacy — also responded to the desire to free the Church, the parishes and monasteries from their dependance upon monarchs and nobles, who were the masters of all levels of ecclesiastical denomination. The idea that ordination did not suffice to absolve the priest of the duty to lead an exemplary and "apostolic" life would only fit comfortably with the views of Rome after the Council of Trent, which came after the success of the moral campaign of the Reformation.

The Christ Of Bourges

In his chronicle of the year 591, Gregoire, Bishop of Tours, reported that an inhabitant of Bourges, exhausted in a forest, experienced a kind of traumatism or ecstasy upon seeing himself suddenly surrounded by a swarm of flies or wasps.[320] (The same phenomenon was evoked in the revelation of the peasant of Vertus. [See below.])

Living in a state of shock for two years, this man finally reached the Arles region, where, dressed in animal hides, he lived like a hermit and reserved all his time for prayer. At the end of a long period of asceticism, he claimed that he was invested with the supernatural gifts to heal and prophetize.

Wandering through Cevennes and le Gevaudan, he presented himself as the reincarnated Christ and consecrated his country in the name of Mary.

[320] Gregoire of Tours, *Historia Francorum,* X, 25.

Gregoire attributes to the demon the exceptional powers that he demonstrated, and that drew to him a growing number of partisans. The man distributed to the poor gold, money and clothing (with which his wealthy believers had honored him).

The chronicler accused him of having formed and led an armed band that pillaged the towns and killed the priests. Aurelius, Bishop of Puy — before whom the army of the Christ surged — sent to him an ambassador who assassinated him through treachery. His partisans having been massacred or dispersed, Mary, subjected to torture, avowed that this Christ had resorted to diabolical proceedings so as to assure his control over the people.

Gregoire himself admitted to having met several of these saints of the Last Days, who awakened a fleeting hope among the people who, due to their miserable lot in the ordinary course of wars, pillage, torture, famine, epidemics and death, were quite naturally disposed to sedition, which was reined in by the apostolic seal of the divine.[321]

Aldebert

In 744, Winfrid, much later sanctified under the name Boniface, united in Soissons — with the approval of Pope Zacharias and the Frankish Kings Pepin and Carloman — a synod intended to break the popular movement of the monk named Aldebert.[322]

A wandering preacher, self-avowed monk and practicer of voluntary poverty, Aldebert was attacked by the Bishops of Soissons, who prohibited him from preaching in the churches.

Aldebert then erected crosses in the countryside, at the foot of which he addressed crowds seduced by his remarks. Soon his faithful built little chapels, then churches, in which he could preach.

To those who heard him, he affirmed having been invested with divine grace from the bosom of his mother. In the manner of Mary, and in the fashion reported in the gospels of the childhood [of Jesus], she placed him in the world through the right flank, by this designating him to be the second Christ. Aldebert's privileged relationship with God was expressed in a prayer that Boniface retranscribed for the Pope's sake. In it, Aldebert evoked the support of the angels, thanks to whom he obtained — for himself and his faithful — the grace of being fulfilled in his desires. Like King Abgar, Aldebert kept a personal letter from Jesus, from which he derived his own teachings.

The synodal report noted with disdain that the simple people and the women were neglecting to follow the priests and bishops. They seemed to follow a cult of nature that competed with the traditional trade in relics, because they deemed precious and preserved the fingernail clippings and locks of hair with which Aldebert gratified them.

Arrested and condemned by the synod of Soissons in 744, Aldebert managed to escape. The following year, another synod presided over by Boniface and King Carloman would excommunicate him but without appreciable results, because, in 745, a synod in Rome of twenty-seven bishops presided over by Pope Zacharias himself decided to declare Aldebert mad, no doubt due to the difficulty of raging against so popular a man, whose disciples had not ceased to grow. One knows nothing of his end, but in 746 an ambassador of King Pepin, who was close to the Pope, attested to the persistant vogue for the Christ in North France.

[321] *Ibid.,* X, 25.

[322] J.B. Russell, "Saint Boniface and the Eccentrics," *Church History,* Chicago, 1964, XXXIII, 3.

Leuthard

While the Bogomile missionaries, who were Slavic or Byzantine merchants, began to propagate their doctrine in Germany, France and Italy around 1000, the example of Leuthard — a peasant from Vertus in Champagne — is less the first manifestation of Catharism than [the most recent in] the tradition of wandering messiahs and prophets.

One day Leuthard returned from the fields, after having an illumination, (*) and decided to leave his wife and break the crucifix of his church. With a sudden eloquence, nourished by the feeling of having the word [*parole*] of God, he preached a return to the apostolic virtues. He enjoined his many adepts to no longer pay tithes and to accord no faith in the Old Testament.

(*) Raoul Glauber says that Leuthard (somewhat like the Messiah of Bourges) was surrounded by a swarm of bees, as attested to by folklore and tales.

Arrested in 1004 and taken before Bishop Gebuin II of Chalons (an instructed and cunning man), Leuthard became aware of the vanity of his enterprise; he found himself alone, habitually described as mad; he threw himself into a well that same year.

Leuthard's rejection of the cross, the Old Testament and marriage does not suggest — beyond the ordinary condemnations of the Church and tithes — the possibly confused influence of Bogomilism. In the same way that, less than a century later, peasants in the Chalons region fell under the accusation of Catharism. But it is true that, around 1025, the Italian Gandulf openly preached Bogomilism.

Eudes De L'etoile, Or Eudo De Stella

Originally from Loudeac in Britain, perhaps from minor nobility, Eudes preached in the name of Christ against the priests and monks in 1145 or so, while Bernard of Clairvaux was hastening to restore the monastical orders and the clergy to dignity and holy appearance. Eudes lived in a community that was supposedly quite numerous, and exalted asceticism and the evangelical life.

His faithful called him the Lord of Lords. At a time when the myth of an immanent justice nourished the hopes of the disinherited, Eudes came to judge the living and the dead. Chroniclers have mocked his completely personal interpretation of the formula for exorcism: "*Per eum qui venturus est judicare vivos et mortuous,*" which meant, according to him, "Through Eudes, who will come to judge the living and the dead." What have we got here, other than a Jewish, Gnostic or Judeo-Christian exegesis of the Bible? Wasn't this the way that the famous evangelical truths were taken from Hebrew and Aramaic *midrashim*?

In the forests in which his partisans took refuge as if in a new "desert," Eudes founded a Church with archbishops and bishops to whom he gave such names as Wisdom, Knowledge, and Judgment, each endowed with a singular Gnostic connotation. (A systematic study, in the manner of [Robert] Graves, of all Christian mythology would show the progress, nay, the wandering, the recreation, the reoccurrence and the transformation of [certain] fundamental themes.)

While Bretagne, ravaged by famine in 1144 and 1145, was prey to pillage and brigandage, the partisans of Eudes conducted the raids that, destroying churches and monasteries, assured their own subsistance.

According to William of Newburg, Eudes and his faithful lived in luxury, were magnificently dressed and [lived] in a state of "perfect joy," an expression that perhaps suggests a faraway influence of the

Bogomiles or Cathars, but one must remember that William drafted his chronicle 50 years after the events he describes.[323]

Like Paul of Samosate or Gaianus, Eudes celebrated Mass in his own name. An even more curious trait: he possessed a sceptre in the form of a Y. The two branches of the fork elevated towards heaven meant that two tiers of the world belonged to God and one tier belonged to Eudes. The proportion was inverted in the contrary movement, conferring upon Eudes a nearly absolute power over the world, which was the old dream of the Marcosians, Simon of Samaria, and the Barbelites: memories of ancient trinitary conceptions that were no doubt unfamiliar to the gentleman from Breton.

As is frequently the case when fatuity has the upper hand on the quest for a richer life, Eudes was confronted by the representatives of the Church who met sin Rouen in 1148. Thrown in the archbishop's prison, he perished there from hunger and ill-treatment. His partisans, arrested, died on the pyre.

Two Reformers: Pierre De Bruys And Henri Du Mans

While the new towns attempted to use insurrection to obtain the independence that was refused them by the lay lords and the prince-bishops — who were increasingly objects of a growing hatred because they, residing in the city, publicly insulted the Church's principles of holiness through their dissolute morals and rapacity — , preachers wandered around France, where peasants and artisans were the most disposed to receive their messages. Two figures, identified by ecclesiastical repression, stand out from the others, who remain unknown: independent preachers, communalist agitators, Bogomile missionaries, and Cathars, who denounced clerics and monks attached to the privileges of Rome, who in their turn, stipended by the Church, hunted down heretics.

Around 1105, Pierre de Bruys, an old Provencal priest, traveled the south of France, preaching especially on the eastern side of the Rhone. He called for the destruction of churches, because one could pray just as well in a youth hostel or a stable. He burned crosses, instruments of the martyrdom of the Christ, the symbolism of which only too perfectly accorded itself with the cruel oppression of the Church.

The dead had no need of prayer [for Pierre de Bruys]. What value were the sacraments administered by priests who most often were themselves unworthy, and why did not faith assure the salvation of the faithful, who were so badly served by the clergy of Rome?

Not content with encouraging the traditional refusal to pay tithes (which itself sufficed to bring about accusations of heresy), Pierre de Bruys denounced the market in penitence and indulgences.

He thus attracted the animosity of Cluny, where Bernard de Claivaux was simultaneously moralizing to the clergy about the respect and obedience that were due to the dignitaries of the clergy, and inciting *ad capiendos vulpes* to capture the foxes of heresy. The Council of Toulouse would condemn Pierre's doctrine in 1119, no doubt due to the agitation that he had fomented, in the course of which (one believes) he met his disciple and successor, Henri du Mans.

Pierre de Bruys perished in an ambush near the Abbey of Sant-Gilles, where he preached around 1126. A faction probably incited by Cluny seized him and lynched him, before throwing his body into a pyre. (The cross sculpted on the tympanum of the Cathedral, then being constructed, was erected in defiance of Peter's partisans, who denounced the cross's morbid and mortifying character.)

[323]William of Newburg, *Historia Rerum Anglicarum,* t. XXV.

Several years later, Pierre the Venerable, Abbey of Cluny, would distribute a *Treatise against the Petrobrusians* that justified the [repression of the] doctrines adopted by Henri du Mans, around whom the partisans of Pierre de Bruys rallied. The Councils of Pisa (1134) and Lateran (1139) would make the condemnation precise.

Deceased around 1148, Henri du Mans (also called Henri de Lausanne) founded his agitation on communalist struggles that opposed the cities to the Church and the terrestrial aristocracy, which was often hostile to the emerging bourgeoisie. His doctrine, which was perfectly coherent, mixed ideas defended by Pierre de Bruys with elements derived from Bogomilism, and prepared the way for Catharism, nay, the competing movement, Valdeism.

The origins of Henri du Mans remain obscure. A monk or hermit, he was highly cultured; Bernard de Clairvaux called him *litteratus.* Perhaps he preached in Lausanne against the general corruption of the clergy and in the Petrobrusian spirit that opposed the *ekklesia,* identified with a community of believers, to the Roman Church. In 1116, the success of Henri's predictions in Mans worried Bishop Hildebert of Lavardin, who prohibited him from preaching. Henri ignored him and enjoyed, it seems, a considerable role in the government of the city. It is probable that the bishops at first tolerated some of Henri's reforms. As Pope Innocent III had recommended raising the moral state of prostitutes and saving them from scorn, Henri persuaded them to cut their hair, burn their rich clothes, and divest themselves of their finery. The sect offered them an outfit and their adepts married these "impure" women, without dowries. In place of marriage, the celebration as Henri prescribed it was accomplished with the mutual consent and sincere union of their hearts.

A clear break with the misogyny harbored by the Church participated in this courteous current, which, even today, is only superficially studied, but was certainly noticed by the court of Champagne, where Andrew the Chaplain (*) treated it antithetically to the way it was treated in the Languedoc, where the freedom of women was translated into the juridical domain, as well.

(*) A Twelfth Century Champenois cleric, the author of *De amore* (around 1185) in two parts: one that exalted women and carnal love, another that collated the most excessive instances of misogyny.

Henri's exaltation of apostolic virtues did not tip over into ascetic rigor, because he estimated — contrary to the Cathars — that the flesh merited neither an excess of dignity nor an excess of indignity.

In 1116, chased from the town, or leaving it voluntarily (one isn't sure), Henri traveled in Poitou, Bordelais and the region of Albi. No doubt he participated in the agitation in Toulouse, where it is possible that encountering Pierre de Bruys radicalized his evangelical doctrine. In 1119, the Council of Toulouse thrashed Henri's "errors." It seems that, at the same time, his partisans were sacking churches, demolishing altars, burning the crosses and roughing up the Church's representatives.

Arrested by the Archbishop of Arles, Henri was brought before the Council of Pisa; put before Bernard de Clairvaux, Henri feigned that he accepted his arguments and agreed to enter Citeaux, so as to avoid prison, if not the pyre.

He soon escaped and returned to Provence. If we believe the words of Bernard de Clairvaux, who was resolved to finish off the Henricians, Toulouse lived under the influence of this reformer. It is true that the Count did not discourage the anti-Roman movement, which was widely popular and from which Catharism would freely benefit. One doesn't know if Henri fell into the hands of Cardinal Alberic, papal legatee of Rome, who had sworn Henri's downfall. His traces disappear in 1144.

Around 1135, a community in Liege claimed the Henrician doctrine for itself: the rejection of the baptism of infants and prayers for the dead, and the refusal of the sacrament of marriage in the name of the union of hearts.

Like the Bogomiles, Henri was inclined to reject the Old Testament. His condemnation of the ornamental luxury of the churches, to which Bernard de Calirvaux had subscribed, announced the voluntary poverty of the Vaudois.

Chapter 27: The Communalist Prophets

The Sixth Century brought to the Western populations [of Europe] a slight amelioration of the conditions of life, which demographic growth soon condemned to precarity. While the development of the cities introduced the air of liberty in the confined atmosphere of an agrarian system that was socially frozen according to the three orders of Rathier of Verona — soldiers, priests and farmers — , the economic growth of the towns, little by little, began to absorb the excess of manual labor produced by the countryside.

The swarming beggars, fomenting riots that were easily manipulated in the most diverse ways, were a common fund of laborers for those who learned to play the roles of lord or archbishop, guild-leader or popular agitator. Their violence also struck the masters as well as the rebels or the Jews, who were scapregoats for all kinds of fantastic resentments.

The first Crusade, launched 1095 by Pope Urban II — who counted among his motivations the desire to re-locate into the conquered countries the superabundance of disinherited people, ruined nobles, and people of uncertain fate — suddenly revealed in the designs of God and the Pope something that sanctified the thirst for ambition, cupidity and bloody desublimation [*defoulements*].

The influx of poor peoples into the towns posed a dilemma for the Church: how could it Christianize creatures reduced to the state of wild, starving dogs by extolling to them the holiness of the poor, while the high clergy lived in opulence?

"Insurrections occurred chiefly in episcopal cities," notes Cohn.

> Unlike a lay prince [Cohn continues], a bishop was a resident ruler in his city and was naturally concerned to keep his authority over the subjects in whose midst he lived. Moreover the attitude of the Church towards economic matters was profoundly conservative; in trade it could for a long time see nothing but usury and in merchants nothing but dangerous innovators whose designs ought to be firmly thwarted. The burghers for their part, if once they decided to break a bishop's power, were quite capable of killing him, setting fire to his cathedral and fighting off any of his vassals who might try to avenge him. And although in all this their aims usually remained severely limited and entirely material, it was only to be expected that some of these risings should be accompanied by an outcry against unworthy priests. When the lower strata of urban society were involved such protests tended in fact to rise shrilly enough.[324]

[324] N. Cohn, *Les fanatiques de l'Apocalypse,* Paris, 1983, p. 46. [*Translator*: this is the French translation of Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary messianism in medieval and Reformation Europe and its bearing on modern totalitarian movements,* New York, 1961, pp. 33–34. Rather than translate Cohn back into English, we have directly quoted from the English-language original. Note a slight disagreement or slippage: while Cohn refers to "burghers," that is, inhabitants of boroughs or towns, Vaneigem and/or the translator of the volume he consulted refers to *les bourgeois.* For a general review of the influence Cohn's book had on Vaneigem and other members of the Situationist International, see our comments at www.notbored.org.]

The Patarin Movement

The Gregorian reform undertaken by the Clunisian monk Hildebrand, inaugurated pope under the name Gregoire VII, attempted to promote a politics of the moralization of the clergy, which would be of a nature to favor the Christianization of the masses. At the same time that it desired to free the Church from the temporal control of the Emperor of Germany, and thus the great feudal lords, Gregorian reform clashed with the very privileges of the ecclesiastical dignitaries, princes, bishops, and archbishops, nay, the parish priests who arrogated to themselves an excessive authority over rural communities or parishes.

"The purety of the life that the heretics preached became the second great goal of Gregoire VII, who, behind the sacramental office of priest, maintained the requirement of his personal dignity."[325]

The Patarin movement in Milan and Florence conferred upon Gregoire's reforms a popular basis, in which voluntary poverty was proposed as the model for an apostolic life and organized the communities of the faithful according to a mode of solidarity and mutual aid that was quite similar to that of the synagogues and churches of the Second Century.

The name Patarin probably derived from the neighborhood of Pataria in Milan, inhabited by salt-sellers and dealers in second-hand items. The Patarins, contrary to a confusion often made between *cathari* and *patari,* had nothing in common with the Cathars, since they were not preoccupied with the reform of the Church or even adhesion to Christianity.

In 1057, Guido, Archbishop of Milan, condemned the Patarin movement. Social insurrection was battering the authority of the men of the Church, with the consent of the pope, whose politics bet upon communal liberties so as to break the power of the feudal bishops. Nevertheless, "the union of the Pope and the Patarins was a union of means and not ends."[326]

Tactically in solidarity with the reformers, the bourgeois and the weavers, who animated the movement, demanded liberties that the Church would combat from the moment that the aid of these allies lost its utility.

The *patari* rapidly spread to Tuscany. They would exist until 1110 in Florence, 1120 in Orvieto and the region of Treves. Nevertheless, the reaction did not wait. In 1075, the Patarins of Milan, accused of arson, were massacred.

The case of Ramihrdus, in Cambria, is exemplary in this sense. In 1077, an insurrection of bourgeois and weavers forced the bishop to enfranchise the town. Priest Ramihrdus, who was close the weavers — who especially propagated the most radical demands and doctrines — proclaimed that he would not receive communion from the hands of any of the abbeys or bishops who were thirsty for power and gain. Accused of heresy and burned alive, Ramihrdus would have the posthumous consolation of being honored as a martyr by Gregoire VII.[327]

So as to compete with the reformers who were too audacious, the hermits of Citeaux, under the leadership of Robert of Molesme, founded groups of ascetics and the voluntarily poor who renounced all personal property. "To possess the smallest amount of money was, for them, a flagrant infraction of this principle and a 'grave' sin."[328]

In the same way, Robert of Arbrissel and his nomadic penitents, at the heart of the Church, defended one of the themes of the anti-clerical reformers: mankind only uses the riches of which God remains

[325] A. Borst, *Les Cathares,* Paris, 1974, p. 73.
[326] *Ibid.,* p. 73.
[327] *Ibid.*
[328] T. Manteuffel, *Naissance d'une heresie: Les adeptes de la pauvrete volontaire,* Paris-La Haye, 1970, p. 29.

the unique owner. But were not Rome, the Churches and the abbeys instituted as the depositories of God's presence? After twenty-five years of existence, Citeaux was no longer a rich monastery with a doctrine centered on the poor. The papacy would not delay in rendering to the Church what was the property of the Lord, whose glory it maintained.

Tanchelm Of Antwerp

Even when stripped of the calumnies made by the Archbishop of Utrecht, the person of Tanchelm differs from Ramihrdus and the Patarin movement in many ways. Tanchelm's first step towards power inscribed itself in the framework of pontifical reforms to which Robert II, Count of Flanders, was attached; Tanchelm might have been the Count's officer or notary. He assuredly took advantage of a conflict between the Count and the Archbishop of Utrecht to support the people of Antwerp against a corrupted clergy. Anecdote has it that the concubinage of a priest named Hilduin with his niece incited Tanchelm to fulminate against the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

Tanchelm went to Rome, where Pascal II, the Pope from 1099 to 1118, would influence his views. He then preached an anti-clerical doctrine, as well as the refusal to pay tithes and the rejection of the sacraments delivered by unworthy priests, in Antwerp, Utrecht, Bruges and Zeland.

To the church of clerics, Tanchelm opposed the church of simple people, whom he would guide in the name of the Spirit that was incarnated in him. It is hardly probable that, denouncing the "brothel of the church," he surrendered himself to public debauchery, as was claimed by Norbert of Xantem, who became a saint following his fight against Tanchelm. On the other hand, the fact that Tanchelm called his companion Mary and favored marriages "according to the heart" reveals a conception that, perhaps, was propagated by Bogomilism, that is, if one supposes that an ideology is necessary to justify an on-going practice among the common people.

A communalist prophet, Tanchelm governed the city in the name of God, surrounded himself with a guard of armed and devoted ostentation, and multiplied sermons in the hysteria proper to this genre of ceremony. One of his friends, the blacksmith Manasse, led a fraternity of twelve men that recalled the apostles.

In a prelude to the Archbishop of Utrecht's offensive, a priest stabbed Tanchelm in 1115. His adepts conserved power in Antwerp, until the armed forces, allied with the predictions of Norbert of Xantem (who preached to Tanchelm, as well, but in the framework of orthodoxy, that is, apostolic poverty), assured the clergy's control over the town, the history of which signaled the continuing revolt against the Church.

Under the patronage of the Divine Spirit, Tanchelm united the function of a tribune and the mission of an apostle. The demand for freedom, exalted by communal independence, spontaneously wedded itself to a renewal of the Christian community, hostile to riches and to the useless pomp of the Church, and identified the true apostolic practice with poverty, fraternity and solidarity organized through the works of mutual aid and helping the starving. The idea that the goods of the rich and the clergy belonged to those whom poverty had sanctified would be reprised around 1250, and in Antwerp, by Willem Cornelisz, a kind of "worker priest" close to the weavers of the time.

Arnaud Of Brescia

Another communalist tribune and reformer, but without making explicit references to the Christ and the apostles, Arnaud (born in Brescia around 1100) had the status of a *condottiere* whose aspirations oscillated between a taste for power and a sincere attachment to the freedoms of the most unfavored.

A student in Milan, where he marked the Patarin movement, then in Bologna, Arnaud left for Paris so as to receive Abelard's instruction.

In 1129, as the Superior of the regular Canons, Arnaud gained a popular audience by extolling evangelical asceticism, which was the antithesis of the oppressive hedonism of the clergy (deplorable in its spirit). He condemned the propriety of the priests and demanded more rigorous reforms. Thus, he did not delay in entering into conflict with the bishop of the town. Condemned by the Council of Lateran in 1139, though he professed neither the ideas of Pierre de Bruys nor those of Henri du Mans, Arnaud fell under the blow of an edict of banishment.

A refugee in France, close to Abelard, he incurred the threats of Bernard de Clairvaux, who pursued the master of his animosity. Persecuted by Bernard, Arnaud left for Constance, from which he [also] had to flee, denounced by an insiduous letter from the holy reformer. The troubles in Rome suddenly offered him the occasion to apply his ideas.

Upon the death of Innocent II (1143), a conflict of succession exploded, and was doubled by a schism caused by an Antipape, Anaclet II. The Roman bourgeoisie would soon profit by demanding the recognition of his rights. A crowd lynched Pope Lucius II. Arnaud survived as a mediator. He dealt with Eugene III, the successor to Lucius, and reestablished him in his functions, but did not succeed in keeping him under his control. The Pope, actually, estimated it more prudent to take refuge in Viterbe.

His hands free, Arnaud openly declared that he wished to destroy the power of the Church. His sermons preached the secularization of the clergy's goods, the confiscation of the bishops' and cardinals' riches, and the abolition of their temporal power. Spiritual leader of the Roman revolution, he demanded a communal republic that would exclude the Pope's govenment. His programme offered to history the inconvenience of anticipating Garibaldi's resolution by eight centuries.

On 15 July 1148, Eugune III — powerless to shake Arnaud's power if the tribune's politics did not tip over into delays and indecision — hurled an anathema upon Arnaud. Arnaud was mistaken when he appealed for rescue from Emperor Frederick, who was little inclined to tolerate the instauration in Rome of a popular and republican government. His partisans were divided upon the cogency of a frightening recourse. In 1155, Arnaud left Rome and fell into the hands of Frederick Barberousse, who, cutting across Tuscany, extended his tyrannical claws towards Rome. From then on, everything played out quickly. For the price of a tactical reconciliation, Arnaud was delivered up to Pope Adrian IV, who hastened to take him and burn him.

The Arnaudites, sometimes called the "poor of Lombardy," sought refuge in France, where they enjoyed the adhesion of the partisans of Henri du Mans and Pierre de Bruys. Several years later, Pierre Valdo revived the dream of reform that implied the return to the evangelical community — historically speaking, that of the Second Century, but which Christian mythology and its sectarians back dated to Jesus and his apostles in an idyllic Palestine.

Ugo Speroni

Even if the presence of a particularly eloquent tribune or agitator brought a specific relief to the [necessity of] ideas of reform, the majority of communalist insurrections pell-mell brewed demands for independence, the appeal of commercial freedoms and the condemnation of the Catholic Church of dignitaries.

As discreet as it was, the work of Ugo Speroni, a jurist from Piacenza, was not less indicative of the popularity of ideas traditionally characterized as heretical and presented as the emanations of marginal or minoritarian small groups. In 1177, at the same time that Pierre Valdo seeded trouble in Lyon, Ugo Speroni led the struggle with equal *brio* on the political and religious fronts.

Ugo Speroni placed the accent on the importance of interiority, the intimate conviction of faith, which sufficed in itself, and he took exception to the Church and its sacramental arsenal. He rediscovered Pelagius when he assured [his followers] that the infant was born without sin and was thus saved, without baptism, if it should happen to die. The true Christian had no need to pass through the sacrifice of redemption to become chosen. The moral obstinacy to practice virtue was sufficient to fulfill the conditions of salvation. It was, moreover, from the force of conviction that the right of the Perfect Ones to unite, without submitting to the ecclesiastical ritual of marriage, derived.[329]

[329] Ilarino, *L'eresia di Ugo Speroni,* Rome, 1945.

Chapter 28: Philosophy against the Church

The elaboration of a theological system that reviewed the diverse privileges of the Church was nourished by Greek philosophy, from which Justin, Valentine, and Clement of Alexandria solicited aid in re-founding the monotheism of the Hebrew creator God upon rationality. Although interminable theological controversies had germinated, over the course of the centuries, on the uniquely Catholic dunghill of the trinity, predestination, free will, grace and occasional accusations of heresy — as in the cases of Abelard and Gilbert de la Porree — , these quarrels did not exceed the framework of othodoxy and, in any case, hardly threatened the foundations of the faith propagated under Rome's control.

Gnostic, Platonic, Aristotlian and Plotinian speculations — often badly digested by the Roman doctrine — would make the ecclesiastical body sick more than once, risking the emptying-out of its substance. Philosophy, which the Church intended to treat as *ancila theologiae,* inherited the very same weapons (designed to combat the closed system of dogma) that merchant rationality would turn against the conversatism of agrarian structures. Philosophy would also be founded on the aspirations to plenitude and emancipation that the body suggested, that is, to certain particularly sensitive natures.

Thus, sooner or later, the terrestrial economy would absorb the celestial economy, and reject the sacred like excrement.

* * *

In 531, in Ephesus, the Monophysites produced a work against their adversaries, placed under the name of a certain Denys the Areopagite, whom the official history (according to Rome) passed off as a follower of Paul and one of the bishops of Athens. The archbishop of Ephesus contested his authenticity. In fact, everything indicates that the author was an Alexandrian philosopher of gnostic inspiration, who wrote during the second half of the Fifth Century. By a singular destiny, and perhaps because they furnished the powerful Monophysite Churches with arguments, the works of the pseudo-Denys the Areopagite were preserved, and they fed a number of mystical visions and the conception known as pantheism, in which God, being everywhere, is in sum nowhere.

Unknown to himself, God [in the doctrine of pseudo-Denys] manifested the material natures that composed the world through the means of a series of emanations that came from spiritual natures or angels. Essence of all things, God gave substance to all that existed.

God did not know evil, because evil possessed neither substance nor creative power, but only resided in the lack of perfection of creatures. It belonged to each to realize the ascension towards the Pleroma of the good according to the ladder of perfection and the destiny of all things, which was to return to the primordial unity. The soul would unite with the one who could only be known through a state of innocence, through a "knowledge beyond all knowledge."[330] This is what Nicolas of Cues would call "scholarly ignorance." The partisans of the Free Spirit availed themselves of an innocence in which knowing and non-knowing coincided so as to justify the impeccability of their unhindered lives.

[330]Denys the Areopagite, *De theologia mystica,* II, 3.

John Scotus Erigena

Around the middle of the Ninth Century, the theories of the pseudo-Denys inspired a philosophy of such brilliant intelligence that it seduced Charles the Bald, who was thenceforth resolved to protect the philosopher against all obstacles to his freedom of conception.

Born in Ireland or Scotland around 810, John Scotus Erigena was around 30 when Charles the Bald invited him to teach grammar and dialectics at the palatial school of Quierzy, near Laon. His *De praedestinatione,* written in 851 at the request of Hincmar, Bishop of Reims (who was then engaged in a polemic with Gottschalk), drew the condemnation of the Council of Valencia in 855, but without prejudicial consequences for its author.

Charles the Bald begged Erigena to translate the works of Gregoire of Nysse, Maxime the Confessor and the pseudo-Denys from Greek into Latin. Composed between 862 and 866, and written in the form of a dialogue between master and disciple (a dialogue in which the ideas of Amaury of Bene and David of Dinant were reconciled), Erigina's *De divisione naturae* would be condemned in 1210 at the Council of Paris, following the Amaurician agitations. Pope Honorius I would ordain the burning of all copies of it in 1225. In 1681, the Oxford edition would still merit an entry in the [Inquisitorial] Index. John himself would die around 877.

In fact, his system excluded theological speculation. According to his *De praedestinatione,* "the true philosophy is the true religion and the true religion is the true philosophy."[331]

> "Universal nature is divided into four categories: the being who is not created and who creates; the being who is created and who creates; the being who is created and does not create; the being who is not created and does not create. The first and last of these categories are related to God; they are only different in our understanding, following which we consider God as a principle or as final goal of the world."[332] Such are the main lines of his system.
>
> Following Scotus Erigina, "two intellectual methods lead to God: one by the road of negation, which makes a *tabula rasa* of all of our representations of the divinity; the other by the road of affirmation, which ascribes to God all of our intellectual conceptions (with no exceptions), all of our qualities and even all of our faults. These two methods, far from being mutually exclusive, unite into one that consists in conceiving of God as the being above all essence, goodness, wisdom, and divinity, as the nothingness inaccessible to intelligence, the subject of which negation is truer than affirmation and which remains unknown to itself."[333]
>
> The infinite being reveals himself by means of "theophanies," that is to say, the creatures that emanate from him. These are accessible to intelligence, "in the same way that light, to become perceptible to the eye, must scatter itself into the air." It is not by virtue of a movement subject to his nature that God created what exists: "to be, to think and to act are confounded for him in a single and self-same state. God created all things, which

[331] J. Scotus Erigina, *De pradestinatione,* I, 1. [*Translator*: the long passage full of quotations that follows this remark comes from A. Jundt, *Histoire du pantheisme populaire au Moyen Age et au XVI siecle,* Strasbourg, 1875. See footnote 11, below.]

[332] J. Scotus Erigina, *De divisione naturae,* II, 1.

[333] *Ibid.,* II, 19.

signifies nothing other than: God is in all things. Of him alone can one say that he exists; the world only exists insofar as it participates in the being of God."[334]

Mankind finds itself among the supreme causes, an intellectual notion eternally conceived by divine thought. Mankind was made in the image of God and is destined to be the mediator between God and his creatures, the place of union of the creatures in a single and self-same unity. If mankind had not sinned, the division of the sexes would not have been produced: mankind would have remained in the primitive unity of its nature. Moreover, the world would not have been separated from paradise by him, that is to say, he would have spiritually inhabited the unity of his essence; the heavens and the earth would not have been separated by him, because all of his being would have been celestial and without any corporeal element. Without the fall, he would have enjoyed the plenitude of being and would have reproduced in the manner of the angels.

"Everything falls into nothingness; the end of the fall of nature is the departure point for its recovery."[335]

"Here-below, mankind possesses in itself two elements that compose universal nature, spirit and matter; he reconciles within himself the two opposed extremities of creation. He is the mediator between God and the world, the point at which all creatures, spiritual as well as material, are brought together in a single unity. Human nature has lost nothing of its primitive purity through the fact of the fall; it has conserved it completely. It isn't in it that evil is seated, but in the perverse movements of our free will. Like any first idea, it enjoys an imperishable beauty; evil only resides in the accident, in individual will. The image of God continues to exist in the human soul."[336]

It is through human intelligence that the return of God's creation takes place. Exterior objects, conceived by us, pass through our nature and are united in it. They find in it the first causes, in which they return through the effect of our thought, which glimpses the eternal essence in passing phenomena and identifies itself intellectually with God. Thus the visible creatures rise with us in God. "The Word [*Verbe*] is the principle and the final goal of the world; at the end of time, it recovers the infinite multiplicity of its own being come back to it in its original unity," or to employ the allegorical language that reduces the facts of Christian revelation to the role of symbols and images of the evolution of the divine being: "Christ rose into the heavens in an invisible manner in the hearts of those who elevate themselves to him through contemplation."[337]

["]Physical death is the beginning of the return of mankind to God. On the one hand, matter vanishes without leaving any traces; on the other hand, all the divisions successively issued from the divine unity and that co-exist in the human soul return, the one to the other. The first stage of this unification is the return of man to the primitive state of his nature, such as it exists in heaven, without the division of the sexes. The revived Christ preceeded us to the paradise of human nature unified with itself, in which all creatures are one."[338] All men indiscriminately return in the unity of human nature, because this

[334] *Ibid.,* I, 74.
[335] *Ibid.,* V, 7.
[336] *Ibid.,* II, 5.
[337] *Ibid.,* V, 20.
[338] *Ibid.,* V, 7.

nature is the communal property of all. But here a triple distinction is established. Those who were students [*eleves*] during their lives, who contemplated the divine being, will be elevated [*s'eleveront*] above the unity of their celestial nature, to the point of deification; those who did not surpass the ordinary level of terrestrial existence will remain in the state of glorified human nature; those who delivered themselves to the "irrational movements of a perverse will" will fall into eternal punishment, without human nature, which forms the foundation of their being and must be attained in its ideal happiness through suffering. Individual consciousness alone will be the headquarters of sorrow.

"After the annihilation of the world, there will be no malice, no death, no misery. Divine goodness will absorb malice; eternal life will absorb death; and happiness will absorb misery. Evil will end; it will have no reality in itself because God will not know it."[339] All of Scotus Erigena's treatise on predestination is dedicated to the exposition of this same idea. Eternal suffering is absolutely condemned by the logic of his system.[340]

David Of Dinant

If verbose pantheism, which, up to the Twentieth Century, has tended to mobilize God in a world that he has only made, and thus makes up for the declining authority of the various religions, this same conception — at a time when the Church imposed the presence of its divinity with the frightening persuasion of its priests and the weapons of the princes — took on a diametrically opposed meaning.

In 1210, the Council of Paris, Pierre de Corbeil, Archbishop of Sens, and Pierre de Nemours, bishop of the city [of Paris], all had excellent reasons for sending the Amaurians to the pyre and to pell-mell condemn Amaury of Benes, Aristotle, and David of Dinant. As long as they went hither and thither in the Cenacles devoted to scholastic quarrels, these ideas did not seriously threaten the foundations of faith; they served as pretexts or justifications for natural irreligiousity or the frightened hostility stirred up by clerical politics; but they soon became burdened with an importance of which their authors were sometimes not aware.

It is difficult to re-present the doctrine of Dinant with precision, because nothing other than extracts from his work exist. Nevertheless, he seems to have advanced a formula that, in the Eighteenth Century, under Spinoza's hand, would still cause scandal in the religious milieux: *Deus sive natura,* God is nothing other than nature.[341]

According to the *Chronicle of the Monk of Loudun,* Dinant was born in the Mosan country, lived in the entourage of Pope Innocent III, who was a clever politician, jurist and man of learning.

The *Compilatio de novo spirito,* attributed to Albert the Great, specified that Dinant fled France at the time of the 1210 Council, because "he would be punished if he were caught."

Albert cities extracts from Dinant's *Liber de tomis sive divisionibus,* also known as *Liber atomorum.*

According to David, everything is simultaneously matter, spirit and God. These three terms formed a unique substance from which the indissociable components of the body, the intellect and the soul, that is to say, matter, spirit and God, had their source.[342]

[339] *Ibid.,* V, 25.
[340] A. Jundt, *Histoire du pantheisme populaire au Moyen Age et au XVI siecle,* Strasbourg, 1875, p. 12.
[341] C. Thery, *Autour du decret de 1210: David de Dinant: Etude sur son pantheisme materialiste,* Kain, 1925.
[342] A. Jundt, *Histoire du pantheisme populaire au Moyen Age et au XVI siecle,* Strasbourg, 1875.

In Jundt's opinion, David knew about a work written by Avicembrun, an Arab philosopher and contemporary of Avicenne, called *Fon vital* (*Fountain of Life*), which supported the thesis of a material substance endowed with different modes of expression, going from the simple to the complex.

From the evidence, [such] metaphysical subtitlies were invested with less interest than the book's conclusion, to which many people subscribed, even if they couldn't read or augment it: there is only terrestrial life, and each person can construct his or her destiny within it. This was in fact the lesson propagated by the Amaurians.

Thomas Scoto, Hermann De Rijswijck

The name Thomas Scoto has disappeared from the memory so carefully purified by the Church that it isn't even found at the heart of the clergy of executioners who [typically] perpetuated the memories of their victims. The Inquisitor Alvaro Pelayo accorded Thomas Scoto a notice in his *Collyrium contra haereses,* published in 1344.

First a Dominican and then a Franciscan, Scoto taught at the Decretales' school in Lisbon in the first half of the Fourteenth Century.

After having a dispute with him in Lisbon, Pelayo threw Scoto in prison and then, in all probability, burned him.

What doctrine triggered the inquisitor's accusations? Contrary to the opinion that accredits the absence of atheism from the Middle Ages, Scoto's conception suggested the thesis of an eternal and uncreated world. Scoto rejected the sacraments, the virginity of Mary, the miracles of the Christ, his divine nature, and the authority of the Church. Four centuries before Isaac of Pereyre, Scoto held that mankind existed before Adam. He estimated that the world would be better governed by philosophers than by theologians, and had little respect for people like Augustine of Hippone and Bernard de Clairvaux.

Is it deceptive to conjecture that Thomas Scoto was [just] one example among other thinkers whose dangerous opinions prudence has required one not to publish? Pelayo, one of the leaders of the prosecution, noted: "Three impostors have deceived the world: Moses deceived the Jews; Jesus deceived the Christians; and Mohammed deceived the Saracens." This was the celebrated title of a book attributed to Frederic II or his chancellor, Peter of the Vineyard, of which no trace has been found, other than an edition from the end of the Seventeenth Century, thanks to the Protestant priest Meslier. But the text, real or fictional, cast a scandalous shadow from the Eighth to the Seventeenth Century, due to the concision with which it summarized an opinion that many professed secretly, and that was expressed in the universities and among the wandering Goliard clerics, but was prevented from being discussed openly by the omnipresent suspicions of the clergy.

At the end of the Fifteenth Century, well before the appearances of Geoffrey, Vallee, Vanivi and Bruno, another free spirit (named Hermann of Rijswijck) was placed on the pyre in 1512 as a relapser, after having escaped from prison, to which a trial of 1502 had condemned him. Hermann's works, since disappeared, affirmed that the world had existed for all eternity and did not begin with creation, "which was an invention by stupid Moses." Hermann denounced the "buffoonery of the Scriptures." Faced with the inquisitor, a notary and a witness, he added to the end of the accusatory act: "I was born a Christian, but I am not a Christian [any longer] because the Christians are perfectly stupid." David of Dinant, Thomas Scoto, Hermann de Rijswijck — no, these were neither the first nor the only

atheists before the Renaissance who inflicted upon the Church of Rome, in particular, and religion, in general, injuries that no scar tissue will ever heal.[343]

[343]R. Vaneigem, *Le Mouvement du libre-esprit,* Paris, 1986; P. Fredericq, *Corpus documentarum,* Gard, 1889–1900, I p. 452.

Chapter 29: The Cathars

The uncertain lights of Marcion have projected the most diverse shadows on the world and history. The frantic founder of a Church of which he wanted to be the master, Marcion imprinted on the ecclesiastical party, which appeared among his adversaries, the political will in which temporal exigences folded and refolded Christianity until it fit into the Constantian mold. Mani, who came from an Elchasaite milieu, was also influenced by Marcion. Where Marcionite churches sunk because of the unsupportable paradox of a missionary authority that confronted the absolute evil of the universe, Mani fought his way through the old Persian dualism, which was better disposed to receive it than the Greco-Roman propensity to merchant rationality and the rationality of the State, which was easily conquered by monotheism.

The Paulicians and the Bogomiles formed other branches that grew in parallel to the dualism that was rooted in the separation of man from himself, which diffused the fractured unity of human life born from nature into light and darkness, good and evil, and the spiritual and the material, and aspired to rediscover in nature in a new, peaceful and creative alliance.

The Cathar movement, such as it was propagated in Northern Italy, Provence, the Rhineland region, Flanders and Champagne, in the beginning proceeded from Bogomile missionaries. The heretic hunters were not deceived when they called them "Bulgari" [*bougres*], that is to say, Bulgarians (the *Song of the Crusade,* V. 18, calls the Albigensians "those from Bulgaria"). The term "Cathar," which came from the Greek word *catharos,* "pure," suggests the German word *Ketzer,* "heretic." Flanders knew them from the beginning as the "pifles" and in Gaul they were called the "weavers," a reference to a guild that was prompted to take action against tyranny and to spread ideas of liberty.[344]

Catharism manifested itself in the current of the Twelfth Century as a new syncretism, assimilating several Christian notions and texts, but on an absolutely different basis from Christianity and *a fortiori* from the Catholicism of Rome.

The First Bogomile Missionaries

Singular though it was, the case of Leuthard of Vertus suggests the action of Bogomile missionaries, wandering merchants, pilgrims, itinerant day-laborers or Goliards in Western Europe. Other isolated sectarians met in Ravenna and Mayence.

Around 1018, an important group that was well implanted in the working-class [*populaire*] mileux of Aquitane rejected the cross, baptism, marriage and the consumption of animal flesh. Around 1022, the population of Toulouse showed itself receptive to their influence — from whence came the reputation as an old nest of heretics that Petrus Valium attributed to it: *Tolosa tota dolosa.*[345]

[344] C. Gaignebet, *Art profane et religion populaire au Moyen Age,* Paris, 1985.
[345] *Translator*: punning Latin for "Completely deceitful Toulouse."

In 1022, the Orleans affair exploded.[346] The nobles and priests of the Church of the Holy Cross, including a familiar of King Robert and the confessor of Queen Constance, professed Bogomile opinions, perhaps influenced by an Italian missionary. They held that matter was impure; they rejected marriage and the pleasures of love, baptism, communion, confession, prayer, the ecclesiastical hierarchy and the material existence of the Christ ("We were not there and we can not judge if it is true," they said in their vows). Through the laying-on of hands, they purified the believer of his or her sins. The Holy Spirit then descended on him or her; from then on, his or her soul was raised up and delivered from suffering.

Denounced to King Robert, this group was placed on the pyre on 28 December 1022, following the penalty reserved by customary right for sorcerers. The chroniclers of the time assured their readers that the condemned went to their deaths laughing.

In 1025, in the dioceses of Chalons and Arras, an Italian named Gandulf incited the enthusiasm of the disinherited and the weaver-workers by preaching a doctrine in which various social themes, Bogomilism and the reforms announced by Henri du Mans and Pierre de Bruys were mixed.[347]

For Gandulf, it was absurd to impose baptism on new-borns whose reason wasn't sufficiently enlightened to accede to evangelical life. The unworthy priests had no right to the pretensions that their responsibilities conferred upon them. The eucharist was only a "*vile negotium,*" a "vile commerce": how could the Christ share his body of flesh, become bread, with so many faithful? Faith had little regard for the facts. The Churches were only masses of stones; the cross and the ecclesiastical hierarchy with its bells and songs merited no attention at all.

Marriage had no importance: it was only a question of making love without being saddled with an aggressive concupiscence (Catharism was absolutely opposed to such a trait, but, on the other hand, it sanctified [*traduit*] the emerging and ephemeral privileges of women, which would be expressed in a watered-down form by courtly love).

The apostolic life consisted in living from the work of one's own hands, not hating anyone, and loving all one's fellows. Gerard the First, bishop of Cambrai, a clever man who was favorable to reform of the Church, preferred to close his eyes and, renouncing the repression of Gandulf, "reconciled him with the Church."

And yet, in the same era, Terry, a hermit living in a grotto near Corbigny, in the Nevers region, made similar remarks and was burned along with two women from among his faithful.[348]

In Italy, from whence came certain agitators, Bogomilism stocked up and engendered specific doctrines. In 1028, a community of some 30 people belonging to the nobility, and centered around the Countess of Ortes, met at the chateau of Monteforte. They formed an ascetic group whose aspirations to an evangelical Christianity assimilated the teachings of Bogomile and announced Catharism.

The Christ was not God, but the Soul of man, the beloved of God. The hidden meaning of the Bible (*) and the revelation of the Holy Spirit presided over the regeneration of each. The new man, disapproving of all that came from this world, would discover in his virginity his most elevated ideal, the doctrine of the "pure love" (**) that would be proposed in its diverse meanings by the Monials of the Thirteenth Century, the erotics of the troubadours and the Cathars.

(*) Their recognition of the Old Testament breaks with Bogomile and Catharist teachings.

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[346] *Translator*: the Seventh National Council of Orleans, held in 1022 under Bishop Odolric, proceeded against the Manicheans.

[347] Stafano, *Riformatori,* p. 347; Illarino, *Eresie,* p. 68.

[348] Dupin, *Histoire des controverses du XII siecle,* chap. VI.

(**) "If he is married, his should consider his wife to be his mother or his sister, and dream that humanity, like the bees, will perpetuate itself sinlessly."

"All goods must be placed in common; one must not eat meat; one must fast or pray constantly, *visissim,* day and night. One must mortify oneself to be pardoned and as soon as natural death approaches, let yourself come to an end through its companions to achieve martyrdom and holiness."[349] (This prescription was close to the Cathars' voluntary death or *endura.*)

When the Archbishop of Milan, Aribert, arranged to pursue these people, they offered no resistance, confessed their faith and, obliged to choose between the adoration of the cross and the pyre, they willingly threw themselves into the flames, assured of another world that would liberate them from the miserable imperfections of terrestrial existence.

Other adepts of similar beliefs showed up near Verona, Ravenna and Venice. Gerard of Csanad (1037–1046) remarked that they had many brothers in faith in Greece. They scorned the Church, the priests and their rites, and mocked the resurrection of the flesh.

Between 1043 and 1048, the agitation spread to the region of Chalons, not far from Vertus, where Leuthard had previously sowed trouble. At the time of the Council of Rheims (1049), there were mysterious assemblies of peasants who refused marriage and the pleasures of love. They practiced the laying-on of hands and refused to kill animals.

In 1051, in Goslar, the emperor condemned to the gallows those Lorrain peasants who refused to kill the chickens that the bishop of the town had presented to them as a test of their beliefs.

For almost a century, no document attested to the perpetuation of Bogomilism, which was subjected to local interpretations in its propagation in Western Europe. Or its adherents assured themselves, through an extreme prudence, of the protections of clandestinity, or the communalist insurrections gave their demands a less religious turn.

It was necessary to wait for the 1140s for Byzantium's persecution of Bogomilism to push towards the west a new wave of faithful, often assimilated by the Manicheans. No doubt the deplorable outcome of the Second Crusade returned to their foyers Crusaders who had become disillusioned and, since their stay in Byzantium, carriers of the new faith in which the powers were identified with Satan's henchmen.

The Second Wave Of Bogomile Prediction

Towards the end of the first half of the Twelfth Century, the "*novi haeretici*" appeared everywhere and in force. The name "Cathar" would only be applied to them after 1163. The preachers, surrounded by their partisans, gave way to schools, organizations and churches.

In 1143, in Cologne, there were many people who led the apostolic life, glorified themselves by possessing nothing, worked with their hands and punctuated with periods of fasting and prayer an existence that was in conformity with the veritable Church, which was assuredly not that of the rich prelates. The first pyres of heresy were lit for them in Cologne and Bonn.

At the same time, two brothers from the village of Bussy, Evrard and Clement, who propagated ideas of reform and purification, were delivered to Guibert of Nogent, who had them lynched and burned by his henchmen.[350]

[349] A. Borst, *Les Cathares, op. cit.,* p. 70.
[350] B. Monmod, *Le Moine Guibert et son temps,* Paris, 1905.

In the Perigord, around 1147, the "*novi haeretici*" easily seduced nobles, clerics, monks, nuns, peasants, and weavers. "In scarcely two years, the Cathar movement controlled the areas from the Rhine to the Pyrenees (…) The spark lit in the East now became a powerful flame."[351]

The old partisans of Henri du Mans rallied to the Cathar bishop who preached in the region of Albi. In the north, Champagne had a bishop at Mont-Aime. The gravedigger Marcus, converted to the new faith, preached in Lombardy. Wandering missionaries reached Naples and England, where around 1162 adepts were quickly put to death. On 5 August 1163, several Cathars were burned in Cologne, in front of the Jewish cemetary, in the manner of Canon Eckbert. The scholar Hildegarde von Bingen did not disdain from denouncing them.

With the development of a veritable Church, internal dissidence and polemics grew. Western Bogomilism was grafted upon an ensemble of social demands and a kind of apostolic reform by letting moral practice take precedence over dogmatic questions. A difference was created between the Christian component of an egalitarian evangelism and a dualist religion that had nothing in common with Christianity of the Montanist type, propagated by the currents of voluntary poverty.

The intervention circa 1167 of Niketas, the Bogomile bishop of the Church of Byzantium (who was close to Marcus, the deacon of the Italian Cathars), imprinted on the entirety of the movement a more exacerbated dualism: Satan, the master of a miserable world, was a divinity parallel to the God of Goodness. The entirety of the beliefs in which the majority of the Cathar communities recognized themselves composed a doctrine that was irreconciliable with the principles of Christianity. More than a heresy, Catharism showed itself to Rome with the amplitude of a competing religion, a regeneration of Manicheanism.

Nevertheless, rivalries and schisms multiplied within Catharism. The conception according to which purity of ideas and rites depended upon moral purity constituted a weapon in the rivalries for power. The Cathars of Florence rejected Garattus, candidate for the Lombard priesthood, and rejected his doctrine because he had been caught in the company of a "star of the Herdsman" [a prostitute]. Thus the star that Lucifer brought down with him was called a prostitute.

Furthermore, in 1178 certain bishops of Toulouse and the Aran Valley professed their Christian faith and disavowed the belief in two divinities.

Such internal dissensions surreptitiously introduced a ferment of desperation into the movement, the power of which attracted all social classes, as Arno Borst has shown:

> The archbishops of Bordeaux, Narbonne and Bourges were seriously threatened by Catharism. In the surroundings of Albi, Toulouse and Carcassonne, and in Gascogne, the Cathars were so numerous that the Count of Toulouse, frightened, had to intervene in 1177. The Cathars appeared in the north of France, in Bourgogne and Flanders; then in Nevers, Vezelay, Auxerre, Troyes, Bescancon, Metz, Reims, Soissons, Roanne, Arras and other towns. In Spain, they were still rare, but one found them in England around 1210. In Germany, one encountered them all along the Rhine, in the archdioceses in particular, but also in the priesthoods along the Danube, in Passau and Vienna. But their paradise was the north of Italy, the walled-in worlds of the cities of Milan, Udine, Como and Viterbe. Towns, out-lying areas, villages and chateaux were filled. Everything that, near-by or from afar, had more or less favored the hatching of Cathar ecumenicism, now found itself implicated by its great stupefaction in a universal conspiracy against the Catholic

[351] A. Borst, *op. cit.,* p. 81.

Church. All of the social strata were touched by the Cathar missionaries. The severity of Cathar morality attracted the ruling classes; noble and princely patrons, knights, and rich and cultivated people were attracted to it everywhere. Priests and monks received and put into practice the new sacred teachings. But these were not the milieux that spread these teachings, because, at that moment, evangelical morality was no longer the fundamental preoccupation of the Cathars: Bogomile dogma had passed from the first rank. Catharism's simple rationality particularly touched the common [*populaire*] classes. A gravedigger who daily experienced the destruction of matter preached in Italy. His principal theme: the Demon created the flesh. Men of the pen or weavers, workers belonging to sedentary or meditative professions, fell into step, following the ruling classes. A proletarian intellectualism took hold of Bogomile teachings. Despite the "affinity of choice" that united the laboring classes with the most elevated layers of society, this was not a proletarian movement. It was disparate in its social structure and, in 1125, it was still unclear which would impose itself, the high or the low, the adepts of a simple Christianity or those of Bogomile dualism.

The Cathars' situation on the economic plane also rested on a contradiction. They certainly extolled apostolic poverty. Each 'Perfect One,' upon his entrance into the sect, had to give his fortune and his goods to the Cathar Church and to satisfy his needs through the work of his own hands. The adept was poor, no doubt, and the Church was rich. In 1162 in Flanders, and in 1163 in Cologne, it offered to the Catholic prelates the spectacle of a church corrupted by money; in 1177, in the south of France, it swam in riches.

In Rimini, as in Beziers, the Cathars pawned [their belongings]. Mobs crowded around these '*pro subsidiis temporalibus.*' And the heretics, who were themselves merchants, conducted their affairs and those of the soul in public and at the same time. They collected their gifts for their Church. They did not prohibit their adepts from practicing the loan with interest; the rich believers relieved their consciences with large widows' mites. Once again, the conflict appeared between the exigencies of Western evangelical morality and the financial necessities of a Church founded on a well-defined dogma; profiting from the confused situation that created Catharist contradictions, a precocious capitalism was instaurated.

In politics, the position of the Cathars was not clear. Especially in the south of France, the ascetics who scorned the world were soon supported by the nobles and, at the beginning of the Thirteenth Century, almost all of the barons were their adepts. Count Raymond VI of Toulouse (1194 to 1222) and Ramon Roger of Foix (1188–1223) were examples. Their wives supported the Cathar Church. An old aristocrat, Pontius of Rodelle, explained to Foulques, the Catholic Bishop of Toulouse: the Cathars are our parents; they live among us. Why must we persecute them? But it was not uniquely the severe and impressive morality of the Cathars that seduced the nobility. The nobility in Provence was poor and the Cathars were the enemies of the Catholic Church, the riches of which were held by the lords. The Cathars did not have a political programme; [but] they became the instrument of politics when they offered their alliance to the Count of Toulouse against Paris. The Pope was not completely wrong when he reproached them — what makes a power is

> always well-made. Here as well was enthusiastic honor and bad conscience; here as well the material of the here-below infiltrated into piety and renunciation.[352]

The first popular Christian reaction to erect itself against Catharism furnished an army of great efficacity, so the Church did not disavow it or reject it as heresy. Born around 1173, centered around a merchant named Pierre Valdes or Valdo, the Vaudois current propagated fidelity to Catholic dogma and, at the same time, the necessity of a reform of ecclesiastical morals. Perhaps it was too late when, the occasion lacking, the popes hastened to combat the Cathars on the terrain of voluntary poverty.

When the Cathars reproached the Spanish bishop Diego of Osma for preaching in magnificence, he chose to confront them under the outward appearance of poverty and humility. Dominique de Guzman and his Dominican order adopted a similar tactic. The wretched results quickly augured the ineluctable recourse to the final solution.

The assassination of the papal legatee Pierre of Castelnau in 1208 by sympathizers of the Count of Toulouse and the Cathars quickly justified the necessity of offering to the crucifix the indispensible extension of the sword.

Citeaux preached the Crusade. The conflict that opposed King Philippe August and his vassal, the Count of Toulouse, added to political interests the hope of profits and pillages less hasardous than in the Saracen regions.

The End Of Catharism

The violence of the Crusade against the Albigensians gave the Church a position of strength that it used to create a ruse, a reform with which it would less and less accommodate itself. How could people so sensitive to the pleasures of the beyond, where the Good God reigned, not be resigned in the encounter with the brutes of the north? Even when the resistance was organized, the Cathars carried their defeat within themselves. Their goodness was founded on the renunciation of self, on their love of abstinence. What strength could they draw from the pleasures that were not of this world?

While extermination tightened around them, the Cathars did not tire of dogmatic quarrels. Around 1230, John of Lugio composed a vast work in Latin, in which he tried to revive the Christian tradition by finding the justification of Catharism in philosophy.

In Italy, the towns controlled by Cartharism were, by turns, protected or repressed according to political about-faces that, breaking and renewing alliances, incited the Emperor to fire up the pyres or extinguish them.

Languedoc succumbed in the blood (most often mixed) of the Cathars, the Catholics and the peasants who still practiced the old agrarian cults, and in the blood of those who did not care to believe in whatever it was that dogma insisted upon. But the Church carried to victory by the French *reconquesta* fell into the hands of the kingdom decorated by the *fleur-de-lis.* For two centuries thereafter, the Church paid the price by indenturing itself to French temporal power.

Frederic II, anticipating all Roman initiatives, soon gave the force of law to the ordinances of the Council of Lateran. He decreed death by fire for all the Cathars. For him, heresy was a crime against the State; he held as heretical anyone who dared to contest his decisions, since he was the Pope.

Rome made use of the henchmen in monks' robes, the Dominicans. Languedoc particularly execrated their inspiration, Dominique, and his acolyte, Pierre, called the Martyr, whom the hardliners

[352] *Ibid.,* pp. 90–93.

succeeded in executing. In 1231, the Inquisition finally began to function. It relieved and legalized the work of the heretic hunters, who had acted almost with personal title, such as Robert the Bulgari or Conrad of Marburg, torturers who organized huge book-burnings everywhere they went.

Around 1244, with the fall of Montsegur's bastion, Catharism received the death-blow. It would thenceforth perpetuate itself clandestinely, stirring up renewals of repression in 1295, when the pyre walled in the agitational campaign of Pierre Autier, or in 1321, when Pastor Guillaume Belibaste fell into the hands of the Inquisition and perished in fire. In 1340, the pyre was lit at Carcassone for the last Cathars. They survived up to 1322 in the areas around Florence, until 1340 in Sicily, 1388 in Sienna and 1412 in Turin. (The first signs of hysteria concerning the "black Manicheanism" of sorcery, which appeared in the Fourteenth Century and culminated in the Sixteenth Century, suggested — as well as a regression of the freedoms of women and love — a continuation of Catharism without Cathars. Confounding Vaudois and the Perfect Ones — one would speak of the "Vauderie" of Arras — the Church recuperated the principle of purity and, in its way, pursued the combat of the angels against the forces of evil: the marginals, Jews, "inferior" races, and all the sectarians of the Devil.)

Dualism And Asceticism

Despite their diversity, the various local Catharisms — mind you, Albigensianism, swelled by the Crusade, was incorrectly presented as the reality of the entire movement — shared certain common traits, principally linked to dualism and an ascetic rigor that composed the first Greco-Roman Christianity.

There were two modes of dualism. One, mitigated, conceived of a single God, the creator of all things, including the angel Satanael, who repudiated his native goodness, corrupted himself, and drew from matter a corrupted world. The human soul, proceding from two primordial angelic natures, made use (through free will) of the faculty of choosing evil or good, and thus threw itself into salvation or damnation.

This doctrine was propagated in the milieux that were attached to a certain Christian formalism.

[On the other hand] absolute dualism broke more deliberately with Christianity and recognized two antagonistic powers, as in Marcionism. The material world was the work of a Bad God. The Good God engendered an uncorruptible universe, that of spirits or the Spirit.

The theory of the *angelos-christos* resurged in Catharism. The Christ, angel of God, only possessed a spiritual body.

In his *Book of the Two Principles,* John of Lugio argued for the co-eternal character of the perfect world, the domain of the God of Goodness, and the bad world governed by Satan. The idea that Satan forced God to reveal the evil that was in him under the forms of the Will to Justice and the Power to Punish proceded curiously — perhaps influenced by the Kabbalistic Jewish milieux or the Passagians (*) — from the Jewish Gnosticism attested to by an Essene faction.

(*) This was a Judaic sect that appeared in Lombardy and was condemned at the Council of Lombardy in 1184. Hostile to the sacraments and the Church, this sect believed that circumcision was indispensible for salvation.

Prompted by Marcionism, Catharism professed an absolute refusal of nature, which was identified with evil, perversion and death. Underneath an apparent respect for life — which enjoined them from killing other men or animals, excluded theft and violence from their behaviors, and taught them to conduct themselves as fundamentally good people (traits that one found among apostolic preach-

ers such as Gandulf) — the Cathars scorned the pleasures of existence. At the heart of a civilization on which the privileges of love and women were only timidly asserted, the Cathars condemned all amorous relations as mortal sin. Even marriage was a "*jurata fornicatio.*" Women were to be avoided with fright. Certain faithful Cathars estimated that Satan inhabited the bodies of pregnant women.[353] Such an extreme rigor did not exist without reversals or excesses. It seems that the Cathar bishop Philippe hasarded the idea — reprised by the Beghards of the Free Spirit — that "there is no sin below the belt."

It is true that the believers did not fall into the constraints of the puritanism imposed on the Perfect Ones and made use of the right to get married.

The Perfect Ones refused to swear, take oaths or sit on tribunals, because human justice was essentially diabolical. It was not permitted for the Perfect Ones to carry arms, eat meat or abandon themselves to the least voluptuousness.

The *consolamentum,* the principal ceremony and heritage of Bogomilism, absolved all sin and initiated one into the order of the Perfect Ones.

The *endura,* or the fast that was sometimes prolonged up to death, was a form of suicide. It was never made the object of an obligation or an inducement, contrary to the assertions propagated by the Catholics, but the *endura* did possess a certain attraction for people who were little disposed to discover the charms of the here-below.

Few Cathar texts have survived, other than the *Liber de duobus principiis* of John of Lugio and the *Interrogatio Johannis,* a gospel of Bogomile origin. Other writings circulated and echoed in the *Summa de catharis* by the apostate Cathar Rainier Sacconi. Fables that composed a veritable mythology translated the teachings of the Perfect Ones into colorful narratives (a dragon carries off the angels in the folds of its tail; battles in a glass sky that breaks under the weight of demons; the theme of *golem* animated by Lucifer…). Their influence on *folklore* [English in original] still hasn't been studied.

[353] *Ibid.,* p. 156.

Chapter 30: The Vaudois and the Adepts of Voluntary Poverty

The Vaudois movement illustrates the occasion lost by Rome in its struggles against the Cathars and the subversive effects of the urban pauperization exploited by the "apostolic" reformers. Few records exist that clarify the figure of the movement's founder, a rich merchant from Lyon named Pierre Valdo or Valdes, perhaps *de la Vallee* [of the valley].

Legend has it that he received a warning from heaven while hearing the *Complaint of Saint Alexis.* He made gifts of all his belongings to devote himself to voluntary poverty and evangelism, such as they were prescribed by a canonical text attributed to Matthew: "If you want to be perfect, sell your goods, give them to the poor."

Around 1170, men and women assembled themselves around Valdo and began to preach voluntary poverty in a strict will of Catholic orthodoxy, without any possible collusion with Catharism, nor with the *Pataria,* who were glady anti-clerical, nor *a fortiori* with the Henricians, Petrobrusians or "apostolics."

The conflict began when Archbishop Guichard (1165–1181), protecting his privileges, prohibited the group from preaching. Valdo was summoned to the Pope. He came to Rome where, scalded by the radicalization of the Patarins, he was enjoined by the Pope to preach only upon the request of the clergy. This was done to support the Archbishop of Lyon. Valdo ignored him. He was excommunicated and chased from the town by Archbishop Jean de Belles-Mains [Good Hands], which was an error all the more unpardonable because, according to Thouzelier, Valdo signed — at a regional synod held in Lyon in 1180 — a profession of faith in which he confirmed his devotion to Roman Catholicism.[354]

* * *

Between 1181 and 1184, there circulated a *Liber antihaeresis* that clearly oppposed the true Christianity of the Valdois to the non-Christian teachings of the Cathars. Nevertheless, the partisans of Valdo, summoned to Verona in 1184, were condemned as "Pertinances and schismatics"[355] in a scornful decree that assimilated them with other heretics. The repressive machine, thereafter interlocked, would massacre them until the Seventeenth Century with a refinement of cruelty that tyrants [usually] reserved for their best friends. Thouzelier situated the death of Pierre Valdo between 1206 and 1210; Gonnet between 1205 and 1206.[356]

The rapid expansion of the movement easily conquered Northern Italy, where Patarins and Cathars divided between them the adhesion of the population, which was unanimously hostile to the Roman clergy.

[354] Thouzelier, *Catharisme et Valdeisme en Languedoc,* 1966.

[355] *Translator*: Publio Elvio Pertinance was proclaimed the Emperor of Rome the morning after the murder of Commodo in the year 192.

[356] Thouzelier, *op. cit.*

In 1205, Valdo probably assisted in the schism between the Italian and French branches of the movement. Jean de Ronco led the "poor Lombards" by conserving Valdo's doctrine. The group, sometimes known as Roncalists, experienced other schisms. The "del Prato" group, formed in Milan, would soon embrace Catholicism.

The traditionalist sect recommended manual labor and recognized private property. In practice, if not in doctrine, it was sometimes similar to popular Catharism. Italian Valdeism soon rallied the adhesion of the "*humiliati*," a kind of Patarin group very active in the workers' milieux, principally in the willingly subversive class of the weavers. Innocent IV was clever enough to accord his support to these "honest workers." Their organization and the label of orthodoxy would influence — at the time of the Colloquy of Pamiers, which was united by the French Vaudois (sometimes called "Leonists") — the schism of Durand of Huesca (*) who, rejoining the party of Rome, founded the order of the Poor Catholics and engaged in the crusade of apostolic virtue against the Cathars, which was succeded two years later by a more efficacious and better armed crusade intended to propagate the peremptory truth.

(*) *Opusculum contra haereticos* is attributed to Durand of Huesca's companion, Ermangaud.

The Vaudois community has continued to this day, despite secular persecutions. It formed a specific Church among the Protestant currents.

The rupture with the Church of Rome gave the Valdoisian doctrine a more resolutely critical content. In the name of a practice in conformity with the morality of primitive Christianity, the Vaudois entered into the wake of the reformers.

The Church of Rome became corrupt after Pope Sylvestre, they said. They were indignant with the Cistercian philosopher Alain de Lille, for whom bad priests could fill their sacred roles perfectly, provided that they followed the rites. For Valdo's disciples, the validity of the sacraments depended on the inward purity of the priest who administered them.

They rejected the baptism of infants for the same reason that the Henricians and the Petrobrusians did. They fought the sale of indulgences, founded penitence on an intimate contrition and only agreed to confess to men who were fundamentally good. They denied all significance to the Messiah and communion through bread and wine, that is, if it was not administered in commemoration of the Last Supper, the feast that united Jesus and his friends.

The Valdois estimated, as Paul did in his *Epistle to the Corinthians,* that it was better to marry than to burn from a concupiscent ardor and that, if there was to be a marriage, it should at least be founded on the mutual inclinations of the spouses.

Unlike the Cathars, the Valdois recognized in women the same rights as men. They denied the existence of purgatory and subscribed to the widely accepted opinion that hell existed on earth and, in the conjurations of war, famine, misery, massacre and torture, had no need of anywhere else to exercise its ravages.

The morals of the Valdois were related to the customs of the Cathars, without completely tipping over into misogyny and being horrorified by sex. The Valdois prohibited sermons, because they had only to answer to God. They condemned war and the practices of justice, and particularly fought corporeal punishment and the death penalty. The remarks of the Vaudois Raymond de Saint-Foix, which justified to Bishop Jacques Fournier the justice without which "there has not been peace and security among men," also suggested the triumph of the Catharism or Valdeism that would quickly accommodate itself to the cruel penal repressions of the era.

* * *

While Valdeism ceaselessly grew again from the pyres that were lit everywhere so as to annihilate it, and managed to spread to Provence, Languedoc and Italy, to reach Liege, Treves, Metz, Strasbourg, Mayence and the Rhineland, before touching Bavaria and Austria, pontifical power discovered in an adept of voluntary poverty the occasion to recuperate for the Church's control the enterprise prematurely begun by Pierre Valdo. Exalting a virtue that this man knew to be fallible (pardon had to pass through the ecclesiastical market in redemption), Francis of Assisi (1182–1225) proposed a syncretic order in which orthodoxy would preside over vows of poverty, in defense of the universal fraternity, including the animals, which the Cathars refused to kill.

In 1209, Innocent III approved the rule of this order, in which men and women were involved [*militent*], as among the Vaudois. A third-order that was more particularly devoted to the lay people living in the world, nay, the married people, guaranteed a Catholic presence among the disinherited and the "dangerous" classes in the urban milieu.

Engaged on the side of the Dominicans in the crusade against the Cathars — in which their leniency was intended to temper the rigor of the "brother preachers" — the Franciscans digested badly this Valdean heresy that they had so hastily swallowed.

The observance of [voluntary] poverty very quickly created a divergence between the "Conventuals," who maintained respect for pontifical decisions, and the "Spirituals," whose scorn for terrestrial goods more and more stood against an ecclesiastical politics that was seduced by the solicitations of merchantile development and the call to "Get Rich."

In 1254, a Spiritual from Pisa named Gerardo da Borga San Donnino was inspired by the millenarianist theories of Joachim of Fiore and, in his *Introduction to the Eternal Gospel,* predicted the imminent disappearance of the Roman Church and the advent of a Spiritual Church, in gestation in Franciscanism. Gerardo da Borga would die after eighteen years of severe incarceration, without having repudiated his convictions.

He found disciples in Pierre-Jean de Olivi or Olieu (1248–1298), whose *Postilla in apocalypsim* announced the replacement of the Church of the flesh (Rome) by the Church of the Spirit, and in Ubertino of Casale (approximately 1259–1320), who preached in Perugia against the Pope and the monarchy, and who called the Church "Babylon, the great prostitute who lost humanity and poisoned it, delivered it up to the pleasures of the flesh, pride and avarice."

Forced into exile to escape from the resentment of Pope John XXII, who strove to decimate the party of the Spirituals, Ubertino of Casale — as an inquisitor in Tuscanny, in the valley of Spolete, and in the region of Ancone — did not moderate his rage against the Free-Spirit that seduced a dissident group within the Spirituals, that is, the Fraticelles.

* * *

In the diversity of forms taken by the doctrine of voluntary poverty, Begardism and the movement of the *Pastoureaux* [the shepherd boys] responded in an opposed manner to the social problems posed by the growing pauperization of the towns and countrysides, but both shared a refusal of Valdeism.

While Beghards and Beguines rapidly distanced themselves from Catholicism, from which they initially emanated, to become devoted to the teachings of the Free Spirit, the crusade of the *Pastoureaux* inscribed itself — along with pillaging and anti-Semitism — in the line of the raids against Islam that the papacy encouraged under the name "Crusades." In a foreseeable return, which was due to the failure and disarray of the Crusaders, the movement of the *Pastoureaux* turned the weapon of purification (previously aimed at the Muslims) against the priests and the "bad Christians." Norman Cohn reports in *The Pursuit of the Millennium*:

At Easter, 1251, three men began to preach the crusade in Picardy and within a few days their summons had spread to Brabant, Flanders and Hainaut — lands beyond the frontiers of the French kingdom, but where the masses were still as hungry for a messiah [...] One of these men was a renegade monk called Jacob, who was said to have come from Hungary and was known as the 'Master of Hungary.' He was a thin, pale, bearded ascetic of some sixty years of age, a man of commanding bearing and able to speak with great eloquence in French, German and Latin. He claimed that the Virgin Mary, surrounded by a host of angels, had appeared to him and had given him a letter — which he always carried in his hand, as Peter the Hermit is said to have carried a similar document. According to Jacob, the letter summoned all shepherds to help King Louis to free the Holy Sepulcher. God, he proclaimed, was displeased with the pride and ostentation of the French knights and had chosen the lowly to carry out his work. It was to shepherds that the glad tidings of the Nativity had first been made known and it was through shepherds that the Lord was now about to manifest his power and glory.

Shepherds and cowherds — young men, boys and girls alike — deserted their flocks and, without taking leave of their parents, gathered under the strange banners on which the miraculous visitation of the Virgin was portrayed. Before long thieves, prostitutes, outlaws, apostate monks and murderers joined them; and these elements provided the leaders. But many of these newcomers too dressed as shepherds and all alike became known as the *Pastoreaux.* Soon there was an army which — though the contemporary estimate of 60,000 need not be taken seriously — must certainly have numbered many thousands. It was divided into fifty companies; these marched separately, armed with pitchforks, hatchets, daggers, pikes carried aloft as they entered towns and villages, so as to intimidate the authorities. When they ran short of provisions they took what they needed by force; but much was given freely for — as emerges from many different accounts — people revered the *Pastoreaux* as holy men.

(...) Surrounded by an armed guard, Jacob preached against the clergy, attacking the Mendicants as hypocrites and vagabonds, the Cistercians as lovers of land and property, the Premonstratensians as proud and gluttonous, the canons regular as half-secular fast-breakers (...) His followers were taught to regard the sacraments with contempt and to see in their own gatherings the sole embodiment of truth. For himself he claimed that he could not only see visions but could heal the sick — and people brought their sick to be touched by him. He declared that food and wine set before his men never grew less, but rather increased as they were eaten and drunk (again the 'messianic banquet'!) He promised that when the crusaders arrived at the sea the water would roll back before them and they would march dryshod to the Holy Land. On the strength of his miraculous powers he arrogated to himself the right to grant absolution from every kind of sin. If a man and a woman amongst his followers wished to marry he would peform the ceremony; and if they wished to part he would divorce them with equal ease. He was said to have married eleven men to one woman — an arrangement reminiscent of Tanchelm and which suggests that Jacob, too, saw himself as a 'living Christ' requiring 'disciples' and a 'Virgin Mary.' And Jacob's bodyguard behaved exactly like Tanchelm's. If anyone contradicted the leader he was at once struck down. The murder of a priest was regarded

as particularly praiseworthy; according to Jacob it could be atoned for by a drink of wine. It is not surprising that the clergy watched the spread of this movement with horror.

Jacob's army went first to Amiens, where it met with an enthusiastic reception. The burghers put their food and drink at the disposal of the crusaders, calling them the holiest of men. Jacob made such a favorable impression that they begged him to help himself to their belongings. Some knelt down before him 'as though he had been the Body of Christ.' After Amiens the army split up into two groups. One of these marched on Rouen, where it was able to disperse a synod which was meeting there under the Archbishop. The other group proceeded to Paris. There Jacob so fascinated the Queen Mother Blanche that she loaded him with presents and left him free to do whatever he would. Jacob now dressed as a bishop, preached in churches, sprinkled holy water after some rite of his own. Meanwhile, while the *Pastoureaux* in the city began to attack the clergy, putting many to the sword and drowning many in the Seine. The students of the University — who of course were also clerics, though in minor orders — would have been massacred if the bridge had not been closed in time.

When the *Pastoureaux* left Paris they moved in a number of bands, each under the leadership of a 'Master,' who, as they passed through towns and villages, blessed the crowds. At Tours the crusaders again attacked the clergy, especially Dominican and Franciscan friars, whom they dragged and whipped through the streets. The Dominicans' church was looted, the Franciscan friary was attacked and broken into. The old contempt for sacraments administered by unworthy hands showed itself: the host was seized and, amidst insults, thrown into the street. All this was done with the approval and support of the populace. At Orleans similar scenes occurred. Here the Bishop had the gates closed against the oncoming horde, but the burghers deliberately disobeyed him and admitted the *Pastoureaux* into the town. Jacob preached in public, and a scholar from the cathedral school who dared to oppose him was struck down with an axe. The *Pastoureaux* rushed to the houses where the priests and monks had hidden themselves, stormed them and burned many to the ground. Many clergy, including teachers at the University, and many burghers were struck down or drowned in the Loire. The remaining clergy were forced out of the town. When the *Pastoureaux* left the town the Bishop, enraged at the reception that had been accorded them, put Orleans under interdict. It was indeed the opinion of contemporaries that the *Pastoureaux* owed their prestige very largely to their habit of killing and despoiling priests. When the clergy tried to protest or resist they found no support amongst the populace. It is understandable that some clerics, observing the activities of the *Pastoureaux,* felt that the Church had never been in greater danger.

At Bourges the fortunes of the *Pastoureaux* began to change. Here too the burghers, disobeying their Archbishop, admitted as many of the horde as the town could hold; the rest remaining encamped outside. Jacob preached this time against the Jews and sent his men to destroy the Sacred Rolls. The crusaders also pillaged houses throughout the town, taking gold and silver where they found it and raping any woman they could lay hands on. If the clergy were not molested it was only because they remained in hiding. By this time the Queen Mother had realised what sort of movement this was and had outlawed all those taking part in it. When this news reached Bourges many *Pastoureaux* deserted. At length, one day when Jacob was thundering against the laxity of the clergy and call-

> ing upon the townsfolk to turn against them, someone in the crowd dared to contradict him. Jacob rushed at the man with a sword and killed him; but this was too much for the burghers, who in their turn took up arms and chased the unruly visitors from the town.
>
> Now it was the turn of the *Pastoureaux* to suffer violence. Jacob was pursued by mounted burghers and cut to pieces. Many of his followers were captured by the royal officials at Bourges and hanged. Bands of survivors made their way to Marseilles and to Aigues Mortes, where they hoped to embark for the Holy Land; but both towns had received warnings from Bourges and the *Pastoureaux* were caught and hanged. A final band reached Bordeaux but only to be met there by English forces under the Governor of Gascony, Simon de Montfort, and dispersed. Their leaders, attempting to embark for the East, were recognised by some sailors and drowned. One of his lieutenants fled to England and having landed at Shoreham collected a following of some hundreds of peasants and shepherds. When the news of these happenings reached King Henry III he was sufficiently alarmed to issue instructions for the suppression of the movement to sheriffs throughout the kingdom. But very soon the whole movement disintegrated, even the apostle at Shoreham being torn to pieces by his own followers. Once everything was over rumours sprang up on all sides. It was said that the movement had been a plot of the Sultan's, who had paid Jacob to bring him Christian men and youths as slaves. Jacob and other leaders were said to have been Mahometans who had won ascendancy over Christians by means of black magic. But there were also those who believed that at the time of its suppression the movement of the *Pastoureaux* had broached only the first part of its programme. These people said that the leaders of the *Pastoureaux* had intended to massacre first all priests and monks, then all knights and nobles; and when all authority had been overthrown, to spread their teaching throughout the world.[357]

Less than a century later, the fear and resentment aroused by the disinherited of the crusades (who Jacob and his *Pastoureaux* in their rage and vindictiveness truly were) secretly fed the hatred that overtook other inheritors of the Crusades, but this time it was the privileged factions, the bankers of the French state, whose creditor would be burned in front of Notre-Dame in Paris in 1310. Characterized as heretics and sorcerers, the Templars would join in the same blaze the humble people and the powerful people who served a power that no longer perceived the utility of their services and opportunely disencumbered itself of the witnesses of its turpitude.

[357] N. Cohn, *Les Fanatiques de l'Apocalypse,* pp. 98–102. [*Translator*: Vaneigem refers to the French translation of *In Pursuit of the Millennium.* Rather than translate Cohn back into English, we have directly quoted from the original, pages 82–87. All ellipses in conformity with Vaneigem's citations.]

Chapter 31: The Movement of the Free-Spirit

Contrary to the religious system that captured beings and things so as to "bind" them, following the meaning of *religio,* to a temporal power that draws its justification from a celestial transcendance, the movement of the Free-Spirit from the Thirteenth to the Seventeenth Centuries designated an ensemble of options that were more individual than collective and were determined to privilege relations with the earth, the body, desire and the flux of life that nature ceaselessly regenerates.

Only the theses of Simon of Samaria, reported by the *Elenchos,* belongs to this effort that discovers in natural irreligiosity the primary matter of desire, which must be refined to attain a veritable humanity.

The conception of a relational unity with nature, perfectable on earth and in the individual, not by the roads of asceticism and renunciation but, on the contrary, through pleasure in oneself and in others, escapes from the syzygy of orthodoxy and heterodoxy.

In its radical form, the attitude called "Free-Spirit" by the inquisitors who were intent upon situating it did not easily enter into the classifications of heresy, but belonged to the project of the total man, as old in its hopes as the wanderings of man separated from himself by an economy that exploits him.

Penetrating into the convents, the beguinages, Franciscanism and the clergy attached to Christianity and Catholicism, the spirit of freedom [also] invested those who were outwardly more in conformity with the dominant discourse; the refinement of desire ceded place to the good caprices of those who, identifying themselves with God, engaged in a project of appeasement common to all tyrants.

The Amaurians

The ecclesiastical concern with identifing the behaviors that escaped the control of the Catholic Church with a particular heresy grouped together, under the name Amaurians or the disciples of Amaury de Bene, the clergymen (mainly parish priests) in villages situated not far from Paris (Vieux-Corbeil, La Celle, Ursines, Lorris, and Saint-Cloud).

Originally from Bene, near Chartres, Master Amaury taught in Paris, where one of his assertions stirred up controversy at the heart of the university. In 1204, his thesis — according to which all Christians were members of the Christ and actually suffered the torture of the cross with him — was submitted to the Pope, who condemned it. Amaury abjured and died around 1207. Struck by a simple pontifical reprobation, Amaury's conception had in itself presented nothing subversive, as it did not translate into theological jargon the reality concretely lived by the simple people and that the accused in the trials of 1210 and 1211 would express more brutally: if the Christ died for the sins of humanity, the fault thus redeemed exempted each person from having to pay it off a second time through suffering, renunciation, contrition, guilt, penitence and submission to the Church.

Ten of the accused would perish in the pyre; four were condemned to prison in perpetuity. In 1211, Master Godin, cleric of Amiens, was burned for having propagated Amaurian ideas, which the Council of Lateran would condemn by judging them to be "much more senseless than heretical." A revelatory formula: beyond heresy, the negative province of orthodoxy's territory, there existed only what was "beyond sense."

Among the 80 victims executed by fire in Strasbourg in 1215, there were also Vaudois and Cathars who were accused of affirming that "the crudest sins are permitted by nature and are in conformity with nature."[358]

* * *

In 1216 there sprung up in Alsace and Thuringia "a new and shameful heresy. Its partisans were assured that it was permitted and in conformity with nature to eat meat and other foods at any time, and even to give oneself up to any voluptuousness without need for any atonement."[359]

An unknown person was burned in Troyes in 1220 for claiming that the Holy Spirit was incarnated in him. He shared the conviction of the knight fought by Thomas Aquinas and who declared to him: "If Saint Peter was saved, I will also be, because in him, as in me, the same spirit lives."

It isn't useless to recall that, at a time when the comportment of the majority of people did not fall under the mixture of terror and controlled hope that was propagated by the Church of Rome and the ascetic rigor extolled by the Cistercian missionaries, the Cathars and the Vaudois, those of Free-Spirit rallied around the most popular and summary credo: "Enjoy life and mock everything else."

The Goliards, or wandering clergy, mocked the Church, parodied the evangelical texts and sang the Mass of the God Bacchus: "*Introibo ad altarem Bacchi, ad deum qui laetificat cor hominis.*"

In the Eleventh Century, Guibert of Nogent (1053–1124) vituperated one of the nobles who was too little concerned with religion. Called the Count Jean de Soissons and a friend of the Jews — Guibert, for his part, had written a work called *Against the Jews* — this nobleman treated the Passion of the Christ as if it was a lie; he affirmed that he only frequented the church to amuse himself by watching the beautiful women who came there to pass the night. According to him, love committed no sins. On the point of death, he declared to the confessor: "You want, I can see, that I give my goods to parasites, that is to say, to the priests. They can only have a widow's mite."[360]

In the Thirteenth Century, speaking of students who were contemporaries of Amaury, Pierre the Wastrel wrote: "In drinking and eating they had no equals. They were devourers at the table, but were not devoted to the Mass. At work they yawned; at a feast they feared no one. They abhorred meditation upon sacred books, but they loved to see wine sparkle in their glasses and they swallowed intrepidly."[361]

Such testimony, which was applicable to all strata of society, merely ended up authenticating the native weakness of mankind and ratifying the resolution of the Church to take aim at and absolve mankind's sins in exchange for gratuities and obedience.

The Vaudois and Cathars, who did without the Church's services, were redoutable competition; but what can one say of the people who pushed insolence as far as proclaiming that each person had the right to follow his or her desires, without bearing in mind anyone else and without experiencing the least guilt?

What did Jean, priest of Ursines, teach to his parishioners? God made everything, evil as well as good. What good was it to be concerned when both evil and good emanate from him?

A certain Garnius de Rochfort summarized the Amaurian doctrine in his *Contra amaurianos.* In this work he related that, according to the Amaurians, whomever has understood that God accomplished

[358]Nauclerus, p. 912.
[359]C. Oliger, *De secta operitus libertatis,* Rome, 1943, p. 101.
[360]B. Monod, *Le Moine Guibert et son temps, op. cit.,* p. 202.
[361]*Ibid.*

everything by himself can make love without sinning. God being in each person, it suffices to attain inward revelation to behave according to his intentions [*desseins*] whatever one does. Such is pantheism, which — perceived in its philosophical implications — would cause the condemnation of Scotus Erigena, David of Dinant and Aristotle in 1215.

William the Goldsmith, designated the group's master thinker, advanced the idea that, "five years from today all men will be Spirituals, and each one will be able to say: 'I am the Holy Spirit' and 'I existed before Abraham,' just like the Christ when he said, 'I am the son of God' and 'I existed before Abraham was born.'"[362]

For the first time, it seemed, the doctrine of Joachim of Fiore found its subversive utilization.

In his *Chronicle,* William the Breton indicated the point at which — at the beginning of the Thirteenth Century — the time of the saints announced by Joachim was confounded with the freedom of spirit that was identical to the consciousness that each person can have of the divine presence acting within and tracing out the road of perfection and impeccability (the idea of the Sophia or the divine flash enclosed in each person was, after more than a millennium, still tied to the Gnostic conception):

> They thus say that in our epoch the sacraments of the New Testament have ended and that the time of the Holy Spirit has come; there is no longer a place for confession, baptism, the eucharist and the other guarantees of salvation. Hereafter, there will only be salvation through the inward grace of the Holy Spirit, without any outward work. And they understand the virtue of charity in such a wide sense that they are assured that all actions considered to be sinful have ceased to be so if they were accomplished by virtue of charity. This is why, in the name of charity, they deliver themselves up to debauchery, adultery and other pleasures of the body. And they promise impunity (the uselessness of pentitence) to the women with whom they sin and to the simple people they deceive, preaching that God is a being of goodness, not a judge.[363]

A sermon by Johannes Teutonicus, Abbey of Saint-Victor in Paris from 1203 to 1229, insisted on the trait most shocking to Christians and Catholics:

> Here there are profane novelties, propagated by people who are disciples of Epicurus, rather than the Christ. With frightening deceitfulness, they secretly devote themselves to making it believed that one can sin with impunity. They are assured that there is no sin and that as a result there is no one who, having faults, must be punished by God. Capable of affecting on their faces and in their remarks an air of piety, they inwardly reject virtue, in their spirits and in their occult works.
>
> Full of the most extreme folly and the most impudent lies: they do not fear, they do not blush to affirm that they are God! Infinite extravagance! Abominable presumption! They call God the adulterous man, the companion of the bed of other men, the being soiled by all infamies, the receptacle of all crimes. Here are those who surpass the wanderings [*l'egarement*] of the gentiles, who lie with more modesty by claiming that the greatest of

[362] R. Vaneigem, *Le Mouvement du libre-espirit, op. cit.,* p. 103. [*Translator's note*: here Vaneigem translates from Garnius von Rochefort, in Clems Baeumker (ed.) "Contra amaurianos," *Beitrage zur Geschicte zur Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters* (Munster: Aschendorff, 1926), vol. 24.]

[363] *Ibid.*

> their princes would, once dead, become gods. Assuredly, he is deranged in his soul who says 'God doesn't exist.' But the individual who claims 'I am God' is even more senseless.
>
> Ah! at least such a plague does not pollute this town, the source of all the sciences and the true flowering of wisdom![364]

If pantheism can be summarized by the formula "*Deus sive natura*" [no God but nature], the Free-Spirit implied the identification "*Deus sive homo*" [no God but man]. The questions "Which God and all-powerful what?" required a preliminary clarification: "Which behavioral choices should the justified individual obey?"

Does not the thirst for power of the sovereigns and princes authorize a divine will that legitimates it? There was an often attested to tendency in the Free-Spirit to legalize through autodeification a similar power or something claimed to be one. Nevertheless, a radically different tendency was expressed by the doctrines of "pure love" or "refined love."

Fin Amor

Hadewijch of Antwerp — whose exegetes, more concerned with religion than with history, have been abusively annexed to the pantheon of pious people — mentioned the Beguine Aleydis, who was condemned to the pyre by Robert le Bougre for his "just love" in the *List of Perfect Ones.* Unlike the Vaudois burned at Cambrai in 1236 by the sinister hunter of heretics, Aleydis was alleged to have professed Amaurian ideas, which were found in the towns along the Rhine (Cologne, Mayence, Strasbourg) and the northern cities (Valencinnes, Amiens, Cambrai, Tournai, Brussels, Antwerp).

The doctrine of pure love — which fifty years later Marguerite Porete would identify with the life force in which human nature liberated itself from its perversion [*denaturation*] so as to confound itself with the will of the God of goodness — haunted the poems and visions of Hadewijch of Antwerp and several Cistercian Monials in the north, without one being able to decide with certitude if pure love was spiritual exstasy, an *amor extaticus,* or an exaltation of amorous pleasure, or an alternation of the two, as in the diverse ways of Tantrism.

The bawdiness of the times, from which only a part of the bourgeoisie and several defenders of clerical austerity escaped, was attested to by various fables, literature and chronicles, and it exerted an equal attraction among the thatched cottages, the convents, the chateaux and the churches. It set up as ordinary obstacles for itself feelings of guilt, contrition and remorse, which fed the coffers of penitential redemption and the market in indulgences.

Thus, the union with the Spirit, or with its Christian form, the Christ, alias the *pneuma* or Sophia, was revealed in the eyes of the adepts of the Free-Spirit as identical to the union of man and woman, the *koinos* that evoked the Hermetic work by Asclepios, as well as the *Gospel attributed to Philippe.* Amorous pleasure, identified with the unity finally renewed between the body and the spirit, regenerated the Adamite state, the state of innocence in which there existed neither sin nor guilt. This was why, from the most disinherited people to the aristocracy, the Free-Spirit gained adhesion — an adhesion that was most often above suspicion, to the frustration of the inquisitorial police. Because, little interested in sacrifice, the supporters of the Free-Spirit obeyed prudence and, with rare exceptions, neither preached nor issued propaganda.

[364] *Ibid.,* pp. 104 and 105.

The New Spirit Of Souabe

A text entitled *Determinatio de novo spiritio* and attributed to Albert the Great continued to fill out the inquisitors' descriptive files about a current that, neither Cathar nor Vaudois, did not (for all that) represent any less of a threat to religion, whether in Rome or elsewhere.

The denunciation of Albert implicated several convents in the Riess, the region neighboring Augsburg, Noahrdlingen, Olmutz and Tuebingen.

In 1245, at the time of the first Council of Lyon, the Bishop of Olmutz deplored the presence in his diocese of wandering agitators of both genders, dressed like religious people but hostile to the ecclesiastical hierarchy and estimating that God availed himself of an absolute freedom.[365]

Such reformers, who were closer to courtly ideas than to Cistercian asceticism, easily won over a number of ecclesiastical communities that had been split between guilty debauchery and puritanical hysteria.

Did not they offer peace to the heart and grace of the spirit to the amorous inclination that carried men and women, naturally passionate, towards each other?

Among the articles on the list of accusation set out by Albert, many left no doubt about the loudly proclaimed innocence of the relations taxed with guiltiness by the Church, the various ascetic heterodoxies and lay morality.

> Man can find himself united with God so that he no longer commits sin, no matter what he does.
>
> According to them, there are no other angels than human virtues, no other demons than the vices and sins of men. There is no hell. All creation is God in his plenitude. The angels would not have fallen if they had behaved as they should have in their union with Lucifer.
>
> Men united with God, whom they claimed themselves to be, did not have to render honor or respect to the saints, nor to observe fasts nor similar things on the Lord's day.
>
> He who is united with God can with impugnity satisfy his carnal desires in any fashion, with one or the other gender, and even by inverting the roles.
>
> It isn't necessary to believe in the resurrection.
>
> [...] They affirmed that, during the ascension of the Christ [the Host], they find themselves elevated; that, standing upright or sitting, it is to themselves that they address these gestures of reverence, but they make them in a way that does not scandalize the others.
>
> People prevent or delay their own perfection and qualities when they give themselves up to fasting, flagellation, discipline, old and other things of the same type.
>
> It is fitting not to apply to oneself to work, but to take the leisure to taste how sweet the Lord is. Prayers have no value when they are [made] under the yoke of manual labor.
>
> [...] Those among them who want to become perfect need not think of the Passion of the Christ.
>
> It is not necessary to be concerned, either in sadness or bitterness, with the faults committed and the days lost. Such suffering delays access to a more complete grace.

[365] *Ibid.,* p. 113.

> They believe that the blood of good men — like themselvese — or their plenitude must be venerated in the same way as the body and blood of the Christ on the altar. They are assured that corporeal freedom, evil, rest and well-being create in mankind a place and habitation for the Holy Spirit.
>
> They say that the Christ knew them carnally, that a woman can become God, that a mother of five children can be a virgin, that one of them suckled the baby Jesus with his mother until exhaustion and fainting.[366]

Love was at the center of the debate that agitated the most evolved minds of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries. The privileged place recognized for the first time in history by women posed the question of the refinement of morals, an approach to sexuality other than that confined to the ordinary rule of repression [*refoulement*], with its morbid and mortifying visions, and relief [*defoulement*], with its parade of rape and cruelty. The *dolce stil nuovo* and the erotics of the troubadours, so uncertain in their daily practices, suggest a preoccupation that the end of the Twentieth Century has barely begun to rediscover and that was mythologically sketched out by Dante's road of initiation to Beatrice. Thus it is fitting to strip away the theological hodgepodge and falsifications that encumber the works of Hadewijch of Antwerp and Marguerite Porete, which the religious prejudices of the erudite have remained content to bury under the moth-eaten cover of mysticism.

Marguerite Porete

Originally from Hainaut, Marguerite Porete probably belonged to a comfortable and cultivated milieu, perhaps the court of Bourgogne, a resident of Mons, where the Countess Philippa de Hainaut — the daughter of Guillaume d'Avesnes — was considered to be a refined spirit, attached to courtly ideas.

Perhaps Marguerite was a Beguine before breaking with the entirety of the clergy ("Beguines say I am in error, as do priests, clerics and preachers, Augustines and Carmes and the minor brothers").[367]

At the end of the 1290s, her work on "the being of refined love" was burned at Valenciennes on the orders of Gui II of Colmieu, Bishop of Cambrai from 1296 to 1306, who prohibited the author from diffusing other books or doctrines.

Nevertheless, she relapsed and — provocation or innocence? — communicated a book entitled *The Mirror of Simple Souls* to the bishop of Chalons-sur-Marne. Denounced by the Inquisition, she appeared in 1307 before Guillaume Humbert, the Inquisitor General of France, the confessor of Philippe the Beautiful and the future accomplice of Philippe de Marigny in the extermination proceedings against the Templars.

Marguerite refused to sermonize, not in the manner of the Vaudois or the Cathars, but because the "free soul does not respond to anyone if it does not want to."[368]

On 11 April 1310, she was judged to be a heretic and relapser. Fifteen extracts from the condemned book would serve in the production of the *Ad nostrum* that listed — at the time of the Council of Vienna

[366] *Ibid.,* pp. 115 and 116. [*Translator's note*: here Vaneigem quotes from *Determinatio de novo spiritu.* Ellipses [...] mark the removal of sentences that appear in The Movement of the Free Spirit, translated by Randall Cherry and Ian Patterson (New York: Zone Books, 1994, p. 119).]

[367] M. Porete, *Le miroir des simples ames,* in Guarnieri, *Il morimento del libro spirito,* Rome, 1965, p. 617.

[368] R. Vaneigem, *op. cit.,* p. 127.

of 1311 — the principal makers of accusations against the Beghards and Beguines who were blemished by the Free-Spirit. She was delivered to the flames in Paris on 1 June 1310. Her companion or lover, Guion de Cressonaert, cleric of the Cambrian diocese who called himself the angel of Philadelphia, (*) was apprehended and condemned to prison in perpetuity for having tried to save her.

(*) Perhaps one should see in this appelation a reference to the Church of Philadelphia, one of the Bogomile churches, still active in the Balkans.

The text of *The Mirror of Simple Souls,* which is preserved in the library of the Conde Museum of Chantilly and published by Romana Guarnieri,[369] reveals interpolations of a great stylistic flatness. Their orthodoxy has the advantage over the original (lost) by facilitating its diffusion through the centuries; the mystical speculations of Ruysbroeck and Gerhard Groot neutralized the subversive character of Marguerite's speculations.

On the other hand, it is undeniable that the most audacious theses of *The Mirror* reflected a common [*populaire*] mindset that existed in Germany and even in the region of Langres, where the Franciscan Inquisitor Nicolas de Liva, one of Porete's accusers, fulminated against the heretics who, supporting the idea that one need not listen to the prophets but to live freely according to the flesh, "maintained their dirtiness under the mantle of devotion."[370]

Marguerite identified God not with nature such as it reigns in the wild state among mankind and the animals, but with a refinement of human nature that, purified of its dross [*gangue*], accedes to the state of perfection or purity comparable to the philosopher's stone.

* * *

Although filled with interpolations prescribed by the orthodox milieus, the text of *The Mirror* is one of the rare testimonies of the Free-Spirit that was spared — perhaps due to the canonical revisions [made to it] — from the destructive zeal of the Church. Moreover, in its initial iteration, Marguerite's doctrine did not differ from the mysticism of Eckhart, Beatrice of Nazareth or Mechtilde of Magdebourg: "The soul touched by grace is without sin." According to a *scala perfectionis,* seven initiatory graces conduct the *pneuma* to the pleasure of God, the afterglow of the seven planets of the Hebdomade beyond which the Ogdoade or Pleroma begins.

Annihilated in God, the soul loses its will, its desires and its essence, and identities itself with the totality, the Pleroma. Here Porete went beyond the limits of estatic love, the beatific vision in which the mystics sank. Because the effusion, erected in enjoyment of God, conferred freedom to the love that was the divine presence of life, acting in the multiplicity of its desires.

> And so, why should such souls make themselves conscious of what is necessary for them when necessity calls? This would be a lack of innocence for such souls and would be *encombrier* (troubling) to the peace in which the soul recoils from all things. Who is he who must become aware of needing the four elements, such as the brightness of the sky, the warmth of fire, the dew of the water and the earth that support us? We make use of the four elements in all the ways that nature requires, without the reproach of Reason; gracious elements made by God, like all other things; thus such souls use all things made

[369] R. Guarnieri, *op. cit.*
[370] R. Vaneigem, *op. cit.,* p. 128.

> and created of which Nature has need, with the same peace of heart they use the earth upon which they walk.[371]

One had to create a nature in which was reincarnated the God of goodness obliterated by the avatar of the Demiurge Ialdabaoth, who perpetuated the God of the Roman Church, which Marguerite called the Small Church. He who through the grace of love fits into himself the manifestation of such a God possesses the *megale dynamis* of which Simon of Samaria spoke. It fell to him to develop it so as to found a new Edenic innocence on earth.

To the antiphysis of Catholicism, Marguerite opposed a rehabilitation of the state of nature before the fall, before the intervention of sin and guilt. Awakening in oneself the sleeping God emancipated oneself from all social constraints so as to accord desire the freedoms of nature.

To qualify Porete as a quietist is to read her with the spectacles of a theologian. Horror of sexuality was propagated everywhere in the Seventeenth Century, but in the Thirteenth Century it was a dead-letter and vain chatter in the homelies of the clergy who were openly living in concubinage and libertinage. The grimacing and terrible face of sin would only truly begin to impose itself at the service of the market in death and the promotional morbidity of the Fifteenth Century. Unlike Teresa of Avila, Bourignon and Guyon, Porete pressed into the annihilation of the soul a reinvention of the body to which love conferred the mark of its all-powerfulness.

Heilwige Bloemardine

In Brussels in the first years of the Fourteenth Century, Marguerite's doctrine and "*fin amor*" were illustrated by the mysterious preeminence of a woman whose reelection held in check an Inquisition that was, it is true, often discouraged by the liberal politics of the opulent cities.

Of [Heilwige] Bloemardine there only remains the popular legend of a thaumaturge revered by the people and the notables, a few bibliographies and the pages that her enemies devoted to her.

The daughter of Alderman Guillaume Bloemart, who died sometime between 1283 and 1287, and whose family counted among the most influential in Brussels, Heilwige must have been born between 1250–1260 or 1283–1287; her death certificate carried the date 23 August 1335.

While still a parish priest at Saint-Gudule, the mystic Jean Ruysbroeck — much later suspected of Free-Spirit [sympathies] by [Jean Charlier de] Gerson — engaged in a lively polemic against Heilwige. Tradition assures us that such animosity constrained her to flee Brussels under popular pressure, and seek refuge in the Abbey of Groenendael (Vaux-Vert) in which she passed the rest of life life.

In his *Life of Jan Ruysbroeck,* Henri Pomerius collected the testimonies of Jean de Schoonhoven, Ruysbroeck's companion and successor:

> During the time that the servant of God (Jan Ruysbroeck) was a secular priest in Brussels, there was a woman of perverse beliefs, called Bloemardine by the people. She acquired such a reputation that, during sacred communion, when she approached the altar collective opinion had it that she walked between two seraphs.
>
> She had written a lot on the spirit of freedom and on infamous carnal love, which she called seraphic love. Many disciples who shared her convictions venerated her as the creator of a new doctrine.

[371] *Ibid.,* p. 129. [*Translator's note*: here Vaneigem is quoting from Marguerite Porete's *The Mirror of Simple Souls.* See The Movement of the Free Spirit, p. 132).]

> To teach and to write, she sat (one is assured) in a chair of money. After her death, this seat, one says, was offered to the Duchess of Brabant because she guarded the impregnation of Bloemardine's thought. Likewise, cripples touched her dead body, hoping to recover their salvation.
>
> A man full of piety and pained by the spread of the error soon set himself against the perversity of this doctrine, and his followers were so numerous that he would unmask — in the name of truth — the writings that only contained heresies under the cover of truth and that, in contempt of our faith, Bloemardine had long attributed to divine inspiration. In this campaign he was proven to have wisdom and courage, because he did not fear the traps sets by Bloemardine's followers, and he did not let himself be deceived by the appearance and truthful sound of these false doctrines. I can attest, having had the experience, that these unfortunate writings were at first clothed in the veil of truth, so no one detected the germ of error, that is, if it wasn't by the grace and with the help of He who teaches all truth.[372]

Though he didn't name her, Heilwige was the one who affirmed the unity of carnal love and seraphic love in Ruysbroeck's *The Ornament of Spiritual Weddings*:

> They believe themselves elevated above all the choirs of saints and angels, and to be above all recompense that might be merited in some way. Thus they think that they can never grow in virtue, nor merit more, nor commit sin; because they no longer have will, they have abandoned to God their spirits devoted to rest and idleness, they are one with God and, as far as they themselves are concerned, they are reduced to nothingness. The consequence is that they can consent to any desire of inferior nature, because they have returned to innocence and the laws no longer apply to them. From then on, if Nature is inclined towards what gives them satisfaction and if resisting means that one's idleness of spirit must be distracted or hindered, they obey the instincts of nature, so that their idleness of spirit remains unimpeded. They also have no esteem for fasting, feasts and other precepts, which they only observe for the esteem of men: because in all things they lead their lives without conscience.[373]

William Cornelius Of Antwerp: Voluntarily Poor And Free-Spirit

When they were not oppressing the people in the name of a power emanating from Rome, the members of the lower clergy willingly made common cause with the oppressed. Among the agitated population of weavers in Antwerp, William Cornelius seemed to had have the reputation of a man of integrity whose advice was valued because he was less concerned with the Church's interests than with the lot of the simple people that the Church wanted to rule. His title "Master" appeared in a grant issued by the Church of Notre-Dame of Antwerp in 1243. According to the man who informed on him, Thomas de Cantimpre, William benefited from a prebend that he would renounce to found a movement of voluntary poverty.

[372] P. Fredericq, *op. cit.*, I, p. 186.

[373] J. Ruysbroeck, *L'ornement des noces spirituelles,* Brussels, 1928, p. 200 and *sq.* [*Transator's note*: see The Movement of the Free Spirit, p. 147).]

Far from Vaudois asceticism, Cornelius insisted on the reform of the indulgences and, contrary to the oppression of the dominant class, he propagated the idea that poverty washed away all sin.

The [official] notification of accusation summarizes his doctrine this way:

> The indulgences of the prelates do not serve souls.
>
> No one can give alms (by deducting them) from his surplus.
>
> No rich person can be saved and all rich people are avaricious.
>
> It is permitted to steal from the rich and give to the poor.
>
> No one who is poor can be damned, but all will be saved.
>
> There will be no hell after the Day of Judgment.
>
> As rust is consumed by fire, all sin is consumed by poverty and annulled in the eyes of God.
>
> Simple fornication is not a sin for those who live in poverty.
>
> There are only three mortal sins: envy, avarice and ostentatious prodigality; also knowing [*connaitre*] your wife when she is pregnant.
>
> What one calls sin against nature is not a sin.
>
> No man should know his wife more three times a week.[374]

This last article calls for a remark. To the freedom that ruled in matters of sexual relations among the weavers, Cornelius attempted to add respect for women, which was the very principle of the refinement of love. Against the misogyny shared by the bourgeoisie and its Fabliaux, he proposed a code of courtesy in which women were neither the objects of rape nor spiritualized subjects. The state of poverty, voluntary or not, accorded him the right to give himself to whomever pleased him (the crime characterized as "fornication" by the clerical police) and to refuse if he judged it good to do so. The parish priest made himself the spokesman of the workers exhausted by labor at the workshops — the same ones whose miserable existence was evoked by Chretien de Troyes — to the point of resenting the permanent solicitations of the men infatuated with their virile prowess as especially inopportune.

Such ideas, which were propagated from 1240 to the end of the Thirteenth Century in Antwerp and Brabant, enlightened the writings of Hadewijch and her international group, which she called "The New Ones" (*De Nuwen*).

* * *

Around 1243, Cornelius' agitation turned to account a conflict that opposed the people of Antwerp and the bishops of Cambrai (upon whom the town depended), who were accused of embezzlement and tyranny.

In 1248, in the manner of the Dominicans who reproached him for his lazk of zeal in the struggle against heresy, Guyard de Laon, Bishop of Cambrai, resolved to rage against the partisans of William.

[374]Fredericq, *op. cit.,* p. 120. [*Translator's note*: this text also appears in Vaneigem's The Movement of the Free Spirit, p. 115.]

On 23 June, sickness over took him at the Abbey of Afflighem, where he died on 16 September. Bishop Nicolas des Fontaines, who succeded him in 1249, organized and personally financed the repression.

The natural death of William around 1253 did not discourage the ardor of his partisans. Nicolas des Fontaines did not succeed in this, despite exhuming and burning in 1257 the body of a man who was a priest-worker before they were priest-workers. In 1280, the Dominicans still furrowed the Brabant, where Duke Jean ordered his subjects and officers to put themselves at the service of the Dominicans when they required it.

Chapter 32: Beghards and Beguines

Around the end of the Twelfth Century, associations that were both religious and secular were founded, most often on the initiative of magistrates or rich bourgeois; the members of which, designated by the names "Beghards" and "Beguines," lived in communitarian houses called "beguinages."

Founded as a public service to stop the multiplication of poor people in the towns that drained the surplus of manpower from the countrysides, these communities were independent of all monastic orders and placed under the exclusive surveillance of the bishop. The influx of beggars of both genders did not cease to grow in importance, especially in the northern towns such as Liege, where the first establishments date from 1180–1184 (and thus were contemporaneous with the initiatives of Pierre Valdo in Lyon): Tirlemont (1202), Valenciennes (1212), Douai (1219), Ghent (1227) and Antwerp (1230). In 1250, there were more than 1,000 adherents in Paris and Cambrai, and 2,000 in Cologne.

Mixing individual and communitarian interests together, the current of the Free-Spirit awoke a particular echo in the beguinages that Jundt paints in an idyllic tableau:

> In France and Germany, the Beguines lived in great numbers in the same house, whereas in Belgium their habitation recalls to us less a cloister than one of our modern workers' cities: they were composed (and are still composed today) as a series of small houses, each of which didn't contain more than two or three Beguines; at the center a church and a charity hospital for the aged or sick sisters had been erected; close-by one found a cemetery. The genre of life of these women occupied a space between the monastic life and profane life. They did not renounce the society of men, nor terrestrial affairs and occupations; they made vows of chastity and obedience, but not in an absolute manner like the religious orders; they conserved the freedom of leaving the association when they wished and [then] getting married (…)
>
> They didn't wait long before finding imitators. Brotherhoods of artisans, most often weavers, formed in their image in the different towns where they had their establishments. Called *Beghards* by the people, the members of these eminently secular associations enjoyed the same independence as the Beguines; they devoted their lives to manual labor and exercises of piety and thus attracted the favor of the people.
>
> The progress of these two religious societies did not fail to create enemies, especially among the secular clergy, whose jealousy they aroused. The parish priests received a certain sum per year to indemnify them for the loses caused by the presence of a priest specially attached to each of these associations; one even gave them a portion of the price of burials when some rich bourgeois (and the case was not rare) demanded to be buried in the cemetery adjoining the establishment; as far as the religious orders, they could only lose out to the pious foundations that deprived them, not only only of the support of many members, but also important donations.[375]

[375] A. Jundt, *op. cit.,* pp. 45 and 46.

The spirit of freedom spread like wild fire in the communities of men and women less preoccupied with theological struggles than the two great themes debated in the Thirteenth Century because their reality was tested every day: the meaning of poverty and the practice of love, which aspired to raise itself from brutal satisfaction to the art of pleasure. When had such immediate questions of utility and pleasure better attempted to discover responses than in these places of refuge and encounter, in which Beghards and Beguines learned, through a beneficial idlness and under the pretext of good works, to live according to their preferences?

From 1244 on, the Archbishop of Mayence set himself against the way that the young Beguines were abusing their freedom. It is true that the monastical communities and the parish priests cast a disapproving eye on the impetuous zeal of certain beguinages that, through the gratuity of their aid, deprived them of profitable business. At the beginning, the Pope intervened to defend the Beghard communities against the despoilations and trials of the local clergy, but the local condemnations multiplied very quickly. In 1258, the Synod of Fritzlar condemned the wandering Beguines and Beghards who begged to cries of "*Brod durch Gott*" [bread by God] and preached in secret and subterranean places.[376]

In 1307, at the Synod of Cologne, Bishop Henri II of Virneburg enumerated the points of accusation among which one could find such collectively welcomed remarks as "To make love is not a sin" and "Those who are led by the Spirit of God are no longer under the law, because the law is not imposed on the just, on those who live without sin."

In 1311, Pope Clement V was worried by the progress of the Free-Spirit in Italy and everywhere else. At the Council of Vienna, which took place that same year, he launched against those "who call freedom of spirit the freedom to do whatever pleases them" two decrees, *Ad nostrum* and *Cum de quibusdam mulieribus,* the ensemble of which formed the *Clementines* and would serve from then on as an inquisitorial guide for the systematic persecution of the Beghards and Beguines, dragging to the pyre a number of good Catholics devoted to the struggle against pauperization and adepts of the Free-Spirit who adjured, if necessary, for the simple reason that sacrifice or martyrdom did not enter into their aspirations.

The Communities Of Cologne And Schweidnitz

Walter of Holland, the author of *De novem rupibus spiritualibus* (*Of the Nine Spiritual Rocks*), a text that is lost today but which Mosheim would consult in the Eighteenth Century, founded in Cologne a group that met in a place baptized "Paradise." According to the chronicler William of Egmont, a couple represented Jesus and Mary. After a ceremony conducted by the Christ dressed up in precious clothes, a nude preacher would invite the assembly to undress and celebrate their refound Edenic innocence with a banquet, followed by the pleasures of love.

In the manner of the "*Homines intelligentiae,*" active a century later in Brussels, an initiatory ceremony based on "refined love" expressed the unity of the body and the spirit in the identification of amorous ecstasy and the incarnated Spirit (*) and removed sin and guilt. As among the Barbelites and Messalians, courtesy and refinement of pleasure, so as to accede to good conscience, started down the road of hierogamy, a psychoanalysis before there was such a thing, in which God the Father, the

[376] R. Vaneigem, *Le Mouvement du libre-espirit, op. cit.,* p. 149. [*Translator's note*: *The Movement of the Free Spirit,* translated by Randall Cherry and Ian Patterson, Zone Books: New York, 1994, pp. 154–155, refers in a footnote to Giovanni Domenico Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum novas et amplissima collection* (1759), vol. 23, p. 997.]

Son, his mother, virgin and wife, traditional factors of castration and repression, suddenly gave their consent without reserve to this essential quest for love.

(*) Here, once more, there was a resurgence of the Gnostic *pneuma* assimilated with the *sperma.*

The persecution led by Bishop Henri II of Virneburg sent Walter to the pyre in 1323. William of Egmont counted 50 victims burned or drowned in the Rhine.

Nevertheless, another community existed at that time. It continued up to 1335, which indicates the popular expansion of the movement and the repression's lack of efficacity.

Indeed, in 1335, a certain John of Brunn (Brno), who lived with his brother Albert in a Beghard community in Cologne for twenty years, adjured and avoided the pyre by rallying to the Dominican order. In a confession to Gallus Neuhaus, the Inquisitor of Prague, he revealed the singular practices of the Free-Spirit in the ecclesiastical lower-orders.

The brotherhood was divided into two classes: the neophytes and the Perfect Ones. The first group, after having given all of their goods and dress suits to the second group, begged and learned to renounce their own wills, so as to be penetrated by divine plenitude. They devoted themselves to work that constrained them and was repugnant to them, so as to better break the body and empower the spirit. Once descended below all conscience, with the result that they stole and killed with impugnity — they called it "sending them back to eternity" — without scruples or remorse, they acceded to the state of perfection and lived in luxury and pleasure. They made love with the Beguines or adepts whom they recognized, as among the Messalians, by the usage of code and signs (tickling the palm of the hand, touching the end of the nose), unless they simply declared "*Fac mihi caritatem*" ("Give me charity"), because they excelled at giving a more agreeably sensual meaning to ritualized formulas.

For twenty-five years, a community of Beguines or Monials functioned in Schweidnitz, Silesia, on a model identical to that of Cologne. The denunciation of mistreated novices drew the attention of the Inquisitor Johannes Schwenlenfeld, who would die, as many of his species did, under the blows of an anonymous avenger in 1341. Revealed by an inquest in 1332, the facts brought to light practices quite similar to those reported by Diderot in the Eighteenth Century in *The Religious* and attested to by the cadavers of newborns frequently discovered in the old manasteries. They only took on a certain relief here because of the doctrine of spiritual freedom, which was invoked to justify them. Same annihiliation of will among the novices reduced to slavery and submitted to the caprices of the "Marthas" or mistresses; same state of impeccability and absolute license among the Perfect Ones, dressed in the most beautiful finery and passing their days in luxury and debauchery. Gertrude of Civitatis, superior of the community, affirmed: "If God created everything, then I co-created everything with him. And I am God with God, and I am Christ and I am more."

The "Marthas" of Schweidnitz often visited other convents or communities. Their presence was attested to in Strasbourg, where their teachings reflected a sermon falsely attributed to Eckhart, *Such was Sister Catherine, the Daughter that Master Eckhart had in Strasbourg,* which described the diverse degrees of initiation of a novice according to the Free-Spirit and the Adamite innocence of "Everything is permitted."

Wandering Beghards And Beguines

The trials of the Beghards and Beguines who propagated the doctrine of an absolute freedom or, in the manner of Marguerite Porete, the art of refined love, furnished an indication of the degree of

dispersion of the current, the meaning of which the Church could not understand, so it postulated its eradication.

The majority of the condemned had either ceded to the presumption and played the prophet or the Christ in a sensual apostleship or had, by the numbers of their partisans, aroused the suspicions of the inquisitorial functionairies, the monks and priests always ready to make the first move so as to avoid the blame of the religious police.

While the popularity of Bloemardine and her reputation for holiness discouraged the inquisitors in Brussels and chassed away Ruysbroeck, the publication of a post-Eckhartian treatise entitled *Meester Eckhart en de onbekende leer* (*Master Eckhart and the Unknown Teachings*) attested to the presence of identical preoccupations in Holland. Soon after, Gerhard Groot and his *Modern Devotion* would strive to oppose to the Free-Spirit a mystique that was reduced to pure intellectual speculation and strictly billeted within the limits of dogma. In 1380, Geert Groote would denounce Bartholomew, an Augustinian partisan of the Free-Spirit; he exhumed and burned the body of Matthew of Gouda who had affirmed that he knew "more motives than the Christ of the so-called God."[377]

In 1336 three Beguines "of high spirit," arrested in Magdeburg, hastened to abjure "their errors and horrible blasphemies" and were set free. The same year, a certain Constantine was burned in Erfurt. In 1339, three Beghards "professing the crudest pantheism" were sent to prison in perpetuity in Constance. Others were arrested in Nuremburg and Ratisbonne (1340), then Wurzburg (1342); Hermann Kuechener suffered the penalty of fire in Nuremburg in 1342 for having professed the return to the innocence of Adam before the fall.

The theologian Jordan von Quedlinburg composed a work of refutation of the Beghards of Free-Spirit, from which Romana Guarnieri selected important extracts.[378]

The Inquisitor Schadelant sent Berthold von Rohrbach, accused of having preached the theses of the Free-Spirit in Franconia, to the pyre in Spire in 1356.

Hidden by the Spanish Inquisition, which often confused itself with a gigantic pogrom, the German Inquisition exercised its bureaucratic ferocity. It kindled the largest number of pyres and cranked the procedural machinery with the greatest efficacity. It was also in Germany, when the flames of heresy were extinguished, that women, men and children accused of sorcery would take up the slack for the Beghards and wandering prophets. In this domain, the Frenchmen Boguet and De Lance, pursuing the demons of their morbid fantasms, would, it is true, give their German colleagues a run for their money.

The execution of the Beguine Metza von Westenhove in 1366 presented a particularly odious character. Condemned 50 years earlier for having propagated the freedom of acting according to one's desires, she was judged to have relapsed at an advanced age and was offered as a sacrifice at the time of a welcoming festival for a prince organized by the city.

The case of Johannes Hartmann, called the Spinner (the Weaver), arrested and burned in Erfurt in 1367, illustrated the behavior of certain adepts of the Free-Spirit, which foreshadowed the conceptions of Donatien Alfonse Francois de Sade.

The state of perfect and autodeification to which Johannes acceded, through the preliminaries of asceticism and revelation, prescribed that he unreservedly follow the caprices, desires and passions that God, that is to say, he himself and nature, had inspired in him. Did he desire a woman? He would seduce or rape her. A valuable item? He appropriated it. The owner objected? He expedited him [back]

[377] R. Guarnieri, *op. cit.,* p. 459.
[378] *Ibid.,* p. 459.

"into eternity," where he could garner the money spent and the pleasures that were offered to him. And Johannes had this peremptory formula: "It would be better to want the entire earth to perish than to renounce an act incited by nature."[379]

That same year [1367], Walter Korling, Hartmann's accuser, sent seven other Beghards to the pyre in Nordhausen, Thuringia.

In France, the troubles of the great peasant revolt and the war with England left the wandering preachers a greater leisure to escape the nets of the heretic-hunters. It seems that the numerical importance of the Beghards and Beguines known under the name "Turlupins" (in the Netherlands and England they were called "Lollards") had drawn down upon them the repression of 1372 in Paris. Mosheim supposes that many came from Germany, fleeing the persecutions.[380] The Inquisitor of Ile-de-France, Jacques de More, killed them along with Jeanne Dabenton, their prophetess. His pyre would also consume the body of his friend, who died shortly before in prison. Certain people gained la Savoie, where the Pope would engage Count Amedee to serve against them, then in Switzerland. An adept of the Free-Spirit was burned at Bremgarten, near Berne.

> Following [Jean Charlier de] Gerson, the sect still had representatives when he was still alive; but they fled the populous localities and hid themselves in overlooked and deserted places.
>
> Gerson preserved the fundamental points of their doctrine for us. They taught that a man, after he had achieved peace and tranquility of the spirit, would be relieved of the requirement to observe the divine laws; that it was not necessary to rage at anything that was given by nature; and that it was through nudity that we return to the state of innocence of the first men [and women] and that we attain from here-below the supreme degree of happiness. "The Epicureans, dressed in the tunic of Christ, insinuated themselves amongst the women by simulating a profound devotion; little by little they won over their confidence and did not delay in making them the playthings of their passions." Abolishing all modesty, not only in their language, but also in their relations with each other, they conducted secret meetings in which they tried to represent the innocence of Paradise in the manner of the heretics of Cologne. In several passages Gerson sets them into relation with Joachim of Fiore. It is probable that they based their principle of spiritual freedom on the theory of the three ages and it is without doubt that one of the five prophetesses charged with announcing the beginning of the era of the Holy Spirit was seized in Lyon in 1423.[381]

While Gerhard Groot launched the mystical and orthodox movement of the New Devotion in Holland, Germany intensified its persecution of the Beghards. On 26 January 1381, Conrad Kannler, brought before the inquisitorial tribunal of Eichstadt, expounded upon his conception of the Free-Spirit: "It is achieved when all remorse of conscience ceases and man can no longer sin (…). I am one with God and God is one with me." He insisted on the legitimacy of satisfying his passions, whatever they were, on the condition that the desire assumed an irresistible character.[382] Thus the Fraticelles and, much later, the *Allumbrados* of Spain would recommend to men and women that they sleep nude,

[379] R. Vaneigem, *Le Mouvement du libre-espirit, op. cit.,* p. 174. [*Translator's note*: *The Movement of the Free Spirit,* p. 182.]
[380] Mosheim, *De beghardis et beganibus commentarius,* Leipzig, 1790.
[381] A. Jundt, *op. cit.,* p. 111.
[382] [H.] Haupt, *Beitrage zur geschicte der Sekte von freiern geiste und des Beghartentums,* Gotha, 1885.

side by side, and remain chaste as long as possible, so as to lead passion to the point at which it could not restrain itself any further.

* * *

The group founded by Nicolas of Basle inscribed itself at the same time in the line of the Free-Spirit, Joachimite millenarianism and the Christs of the Eleventh Century.[383]

Considering himself to be infallible in the incarnation of God, Nicolas availed himself of all rights and powers. Holder of an authority that he esteemed to be superior to that of the Pope, it fell to him to release his disciples from all other obediences and from the states of sin and guilt. To live in his veneration granted one the state of Edenic innocence. He would thus found a "libertarian theocracy," that is, if two such diamterically opposed notions could be accorded with each other.

After being initiated by Nicolas, some of his disciples enjoyed analogous prerogatives. Martin de Mayence, a monk originally from the Abbey of Reichenau, in the diocese of Constance, thus acquired the privilege, conferred by his God and the sovereign pontiff, to liberate his disciples from submission to everyone — Church, lord or master — other than himself. He was burned in 1393. The "sovereign pontiff" himself would mount the pyre with two Beghards who were his apostles in Vienna in 1395. Many were disciples of Martin of Mayence, whose brotherhood of the "Friends of God" recalls Marguerite Porete's expression, "The true friends of God," who perished at the hands of the executioner in Heidelberg during the same years.

While inquisitorial zeal incited the partisans of the Free-Spirit (Beghards or lay people) to a growing prudence, the doctrine progressed in England, where Walter Hilton denounced the "errors of false spiritual freedom and false mystic illuminism" in his *Scala perfectionis.*

The towns gave a favorable ear to the reforms of John Wycliffe (1320–1387) who, without exactly speaking from within the heresy, gave his support to voluntary poverty, denied the clergy the right to possess temporal goods and cleverly engaged the views of the Regent of England, the Duke of Lancaster, who was hostile to the papacy. A schismatic, Wycliffe added to the struggle of the popes and anti-popes a nationalistic note from which the future Anglican Church would opportunely draw profit until the Sixteenth Century. Nevertheless, thirty years after his death, the Council of Constance would order that his body be exhumed and burned in 1415.

The Lollards, who were English Beghards, found in Wycliffe's reforms good reasons for social struggle, which distinguished them from the individualistic demands of the Free-Spirit. Nevertheless, the tendency [towards individualism] would manifest itself here and there, even if it did not present the same radicality as it did in the great European cities.

A disciple of Wycliffe and protector of the Lollards, hunted by Bishop Arundel, and a lord and aristocrat close to the king, John Cobham was accused of heresy in 1413. His confession of faith recalled his loyalty to the king and denounced the Roman Pope, who was characterized as the Antichrist. Condemned to death, Cobham succeeded in escaping and led an army of Lollards in which voluntary poverty and impeccability renewed both the egalitarianism of John Ball and German Beghardism.

Captured and condemned to be hanged and burned, he would leave many disciples whose action would hasten the instauration of Protestantism in England, but also the vogue for a certain "spiritual freedom" extolled by the Familists and Ranters of the Seventeenth Century.[384]

[383] K. Schmidt, *Nikolaus von Basel,* Vienna, 1866; H. Haupt, *Zur Biographia des Nicholas von Basel,* in *ZKG,* 1885.

[384] H.B. Workman, *The Dawn of the Reformation,* London, 1901–1902.

One doesn't know if it is fitting to link Cobham's movement to the activities of Paul Crawer, burned in 1433 in Ecosse for having propagated Adamite ideas similar to those of the *pikarti* and the Men of Intelligence.

The End Of The Beghards And Beguines

Gregoire XI, sensible to the grievances that were formulated by the Beghards and Beguines who remained faithful to the strict orthodoxy of their semi-religious order, brought some moderation to inquisitorial zeal. In 1394, Pope Boniface IX would annul the reserves and concessions so as to finish with heresy all the more quickly. Johannes Wasmod von Hamburg, the Inquisitor of Mayence, then the Rector of the University of Heidelberg, would second his enterprise by writing a *Tractatus contra haeraticos, begardos, lolharddos et schwestriones,* rich in information about the still flourishing communities.

> Nothing would thenceforth hinder the action of the inquisitors. In 1402, two partisans of the Free-Spirit, Guillaume and Bernard, would perish on the pyre; the first in Luebeck, the second in Wismar. In Mayence, at around the same time, several heretics who preferred to abjure their doctrines rather than submit to torture were seized. The Inquisition's last victims among the partisans of the Free-Spirit lived around the middle of the Fifteenth Century. Around 1430, someone named Burkard was burned with his companions in Zurich; in the canton of Uri, the same penalty would be inflicted on a certain Brother Charles, who had created many relationships among the populations of the region. Constance, Ulm, and several towns in Wurtemberg also inflicted identical tortures; in other localities the heretics abjured and underwent penitence.[385]

In 1457, the Archbishop of Mayence incriminated a Beghard named Bosehans, guilty of diffusing heretical books. A still badly indexed literature circulated, often attributed to orthodox authors of seditious writings. (Thus *The Mirror of Simple Souls* would be placed under the name of Mary of Hungary, *Sister Catherine* under that of Eckhart, the *Buch won Geistlicher Armut*[386] under that of Tauler. The procedure would be reproduced much later with the speed of the printing press.)

The death on the pyre in Mayence in 1458 of the Beghard Hans Becker, "*laicus indoctus,*" burned along with his books, would perhaps constitute the last execution of a Beghard. Thenceforth preaching would nourish social demands, while appeals to the moralization of the Church would procede towards the Reformation. But it isn't excluded that the Free-Spirit was continued in a clandestinity that was required by prudence. It would reappear in broad daylight with the Spiritual Libertines fought by Luther and Calvin, and among the Ranters hostile to Cromwell.

Mathias von Kemnat, relating the execution of a Beghard in Mayence in 1453 in his *Chronicle of Friedrich I,* still thought it good to address a warning to his readers: "Guard against the hermits who live in the woods, the Beghards and Lollards, because they are filled with heresies; guard against the articles [of faith] they profess and which are such that the simple people can not hear them without danger."[387]

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[385] A. Jundt, *op. cit.,* p. 108.

[386] *Translator's note*: *Book of Spiritual Poverty.* German in original.

[387] A. Jundt, *op. cit.,* p. 108.

At the end of the Fifteenth Century, the satiric poet Sebastian Brandt still mocked the scandalous comportment of the Beguines in his *Nave of the Crazy.* His contemporary, the Strasbourgeois preacher Geiler de Kayserberg, blamed the "people of the Free-Spirit," but estimated that they lived off in the woods and valleys unknown to other people, as if they had re-found in nature the freedom that would be refused to them thenceforth by the towns that were severely controled by the clergy. Dream, regrets or ironic vision: Frenger also relates the teachings of the Free-Spirit to the imaginary world of Jerome Bosch, who painted the storms and frenzies of the internal landscape in the peaceful retreat of Hertogenbosch.

Chapter 33: The Millenarianists

In the adventure of God, the Jewish, Essene and Christianized apocalypses (or revelations) expressed the historical myth of a Golden Age, passed but promised to return, such as it was conceived, in regret and hope, by the Greco-Roman mindset, deceived by the disorder of the emperors and decked out in all the virtues of an ideal and universal republic.

In the "revelations," the creator God, originally imperceptible and inaccessible, resembled his creatures and, through a growing epiphany, manifested himself so as to separate the just and loyal from the bad and wicked, with the result that, the latter having been annihilated, he would descend to the earth and build with the saints and the elect a kingdom of a thousand years.

The Constantinian Church, called "Catholic," accommodated itself poorly to a doctrine previously and collectively received by a Hellenized Christianity that aspired to the triumph, not of an ecclesiastical authority, but of the *ekklesia* or communities of the faithful. Justin the Apologist, Irenaeus of Lyon, Tertullian and Origen were convinced millenarianists. The conception discretely continued up to the Twelfth Century, despite the reticence of the clergy, the exclusive holder of salvation, which controlled access to the kingdom of the saints.

Joachim Of Fiore

With the renewal of the social and political forms of the Twelfth Century, there came to be a consciousness of history in progress but still enclosed in the cyclical form of myth. The revolutionary process of market expansion, which incited philosophy to free itself from theological tutelage, also instilled at the very heart of the language of God the venom [*venin*] of becoming [*devenir*], a venom from which it would eventually die.

The idea of an Eden uprooted to the beyond and inscribed in a human future that was more or less near expressed — at the heart of a theocentric cosmos — the same hopes for the immediate future that would be sung (to the point of loss of voice and life) by the ideologies of the revolutions still to come.

Ironically, such a project was born in the brain of the monk who was the least inclined to sow trouble in the ecclesiastical universe. The theories of Joachim of Fiore only offered, it is true, a danger to the Church due to the interpretations that drew the efferverscence of the centuries from them.

In the Ninth Century, Bishop Rathier of Verona founded upon the balance of three orders the conservative society that produced the agrarian economy: the *oratores,* monks and priests; the *armatores,* soldiers; and the *laboratores,* working to feed those who protected them on earth and in the name of heaven.

Everything happened as if the commerical flight [*l'essor*] of the towns — like an arrow let fly at the modernity of capital — made the cyclical and static representation of Rathier of Verona tip over into the spirit of Joachim, flattening and stretching it according to a linear becoming, ordered into three ages.

The *Book of Concord of the New and Old Testaments,* written around 1180, put forth a sampling of formulas, none of which were threatening to the Church, but the meaning of which — sharpened by history — would cut like a knife into the adipose flesh of Roman power.

> The first era was that of knowledge; the second that of wisdom; the third will be that of full intelligence. The first was servile obedience; the second filial servitude; the third will be freedom. The first was the ordeal; the second action; the third will be contemplation. The first was fear; the second faith; the third will be love. The first was the age of slaves; the second that of sons; the third will be that of friends. The first was the age of old men; the second that of young people; the third will be that of children. The first passed in the flash of the stars; the second was the aurorea; the third will be a full day. The first was winter; the second was the beginning of spring; the third will be summer. The first carried nettles; the second one roses; the third will carry lillies. The first one provided herbs; the second one cobs; and the third will provide wheat. The first provided water; the second wine; the third will provide oil. The first is related to Septuagesima; the second to Quadragesima; the third will be related to Easter. Thus the first age was related to the father, who is the author of all things; the second to the Son, who deigned to invest our [mortal] clay; the third will be the age of the Holy Spirit, of which the apostle said, 'There where the spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.'[388]

In the precise date that the Calabraisian monk assigned to the advent of the Third Age, the explosive mix of the Joachimite component and historic evolution discovered a detonator. Joachim counted from Adam to Jesus 42 generations of 30 years each, thus 1260 years. As the same period of time must be reproduced from the birth of the Christ [to the present], the new era would start at the dawn of 1260. Great troubles and the unleashing of the Antichrist obviously were the prelude to the birth of a paradisiacal world in which the saints, in joy, expected the return of the Christ.

Under the archaism of the cyclical calculations, there slid a subtle political design. Joachim foresaw the growing importance of the beggar orders, a veritable war machine that the Church opposed to the progress of the Vaudois heresy and the voluntarily impoverished reformers. It was of their pre-eminence that Joachim dreamed when he announced the reign of the saints. And the order closest to apostolic despoilment, Franciscanism, would succumb the easiest (through a malicious return) to the seductions of millenarianism.

With the rule of the Elect of the Joachimite Third Age, the reign of the Church would be abolished. There would no longer be Father, nor Son, nor rites, nor sacrifices, nor sacraments, just one law, the *lex libertatis.* The Amauricians, nay, the simple reformers, such as Pierre de Bruys and Henri of Lausanne, had already predisposed the Joachimite spirit to a social and individual practice that was radically hostile to Rome and, in the best of cases, radically hostile to the very essence of religion, which is the exile of self. How indeed could one, faced with the imminence of a paradisiacal nature in which God would be dissolved, prevent abstract concepts from retaking bodies by breaking the ecclesiastical barrier that prohibited access to the conjoined pleasure in the world and in oneself?

Sterilized by theological and philosophical speculation, certain words began to recover their fecundity. In the notion of perfection germinated the refusal of all guilt; contemplation became the illumination of the God of desire that each carries inside oneself; charity was elevated to the art of

[388] Joachim of Fiore, Concordia, 7, 28 c.

erotic courtesy; love translated the effusion of lovers; and freedom evoked at least the freedom of nature, at most the surpassing of the unfortunate coupling of divine tyranny and oppressed and violated nature.

Joachimism

The writings of Joachim encountered an immediate success among the learned. Among the Amauricians condemned in 1210, William the Goldsmith and Master Godin of Amiens had already drawn the subversive implications of the imminence of the Third Age. If Valdeism and Catharism knew nothing about them, the "spiritual" faction born from the dissensions in the Franciscan order perceived in the rule of the saints the emergence of a society inspired by the voluntary poverty that Francis of Assisi had so cleverly snatched from Valdo's disciples, the Cathars and the apostolic preachers.

The date 1260, forseen by Joachim as the inauguration of the new era, exploded in history as multiple social, political and religious fragments. The shock waves would agitate the stratification of the centuries accumulated by the time without which the Edenic expiration date, always deferred, involved no other consequence than the revision of prophetic calculations.

Drafted in the second half of the Thirteenth Century, two works of wide distribution proved the influence of Joachimism on the political rivalry between Rome and the emperors of Germany. The *Abbatis Joachim Florensis scriptum super Esaiem prophetam* (the manuscript was belatedly printed in Venice in 1517) and the *Interpraetatio praeclara abbatis Joachim in Hieremian prophetam* (Venice, 1525) fixed 1260 as the end of the affliction of the Holy City. The German emperor, Frederic II, would in the hands of God be the whip destined to punish the sinful Church. The *Imperium* ravaged by the Saracens, who were destroyed in their turn by the Mongols and the Tarars, would lead the world to the brink of annihilation. Thereafter, as backlash, there would finally be born the rule of peace and the era of the just. (In the Nineteenth Century, at a time when ideological language had supplanted religious language, such would be the conception of the anarchist Ernest Coeurderoy in his *Hurrah, or the Revolution of the Cosacks.*[389])

The elitism of the Spirituals discovered a nourishment appropriate to their chiliastic pretensions in the theories of Joachim of Fiore. In 1254, a Spiritual from Pisa, Gerardo da Borgo San Donnino, radicalized and vulgarized Joachimite ideas in his *Introduction to the Eternal Gospel.* Insisting on the fateful year 1260, he prophesized the disappearance of the Roman Church and the advent of a spiritual Church, in germination in Franciscanism. The condemnation of the book in 1255 reflected on the Abbey of Fiore, thenceforth held as suspect of heresy. Condemned to perpetual reclusion, Gerardo da Borgo San Donnino would die, after 18 years of severe incarceration, without having denied his conceptions.[390]

Joachimism was revived again, but more vididly, among the Spirituals who took up the old programme of reform and were increasingly opposed to the racketeering [*affairiste*] politics of Rome. A radical faction would be born from the Spiritual current, at the boundary between Franciscanism and the Free-Spirit, which the Church would condemn under the name "Fraticelles."

Here there stood out — that is, once stripped of the anti-Semitic resentment of the *Pastoureaux* and the morbid comportment of the flagellants — an egalitarian social movement for which God

[389] *Translator's note*: in 1972, Vaneigem wrote a preface for a collection of Coeurderoy's writings.
[390] Joachim of Fiore, Concordia, 7, 28 c.

constituted less a religious reference than a principle of government that excluded the Church and the princes in the name of a new and classless society.

Gerardo Segarelli

In the Italian towns, the political and social struggle most often obeyed the confusion of quarrels between the Guelphs, allies of Rome, and the Ghibellins, partisans of the Emperor of Germany. The will to purge the Church of its corruption (which Savonarole would still require in 1491) and revolutionary millenarianism created monthly, if not weekly tumults.

In the Joachimite year of 1260, in Parme, then ravaged by famine and internecine wars, a shopkeeper named Gerardo Segarelli — renewing the gesture of Pierre Valdo — sold his goods to the profit of the poor and decided to promote a community of faithful in which the apostolic virtues of the Christ and his apostles would be revived.

Illuminated, and no doubt imprinted with the hysteria shared by preachers and tribunes of all types, Segarelli soon played the role in Parme of popular and picturesque Messiah, although he failed to position as lies and calumnies the majority of the ridiculous traits with which the Franciscan Salimbene weighed him down. (In his *Chronicle,* Salimbene confessed the motives of his bad-tempered incontinence: "The people of Parme give more willingly to these vagabonds than to the brother preachers or the minor brothers."[391]) Segarelli enjoyed the benevolent protection of Bishop Opizo, perhaps motivated less by solicitude than by aversion to the official beggars who constituted the Dominicans, universally detested for their base police work, and the Franciscans, often charged with hypocrisy.

Rallying the flagellants to his ecumenicism, Segarelli traveled through the town to cries of "*Penitenzagite*!" the popular form of "*Panitentiam agite*!" (do penitence).

With the aid of an old Franciscan, Robert, called Fra Glutto (Glutton), Segarelli organized a brotherhood to which thronged "debauchees, cowherds, swineherds, loafers who roamed the streets eyeing the women, and good-for-nothings for knew neither work nor prayer."[392] In vain did the Council of Lyon of 1274 order them to dissolve or rally to one of the orders recognized by Rome.

Strong from their numerical significance and their growing audience, the Segarellists sent out missionaries, wandering apostles often confused with the Beghards, who shared with them a common devotion to voluntary poverty and the impeccability that it guaranteed.

The influence of "the spirit of freedom" was not absent from Segarellism, despite its exhortations to penitence. The prophet himself made assurances that the life of the poor was the true life of the apostles, "the most perfect of lives (…), freedom in adoring God, freedom in sermons, freedom in the relations between man and woman."[393]

One attributes to Segarelli and his disciples the practice — recommended by the very orthodox Robert of Abrissel — of the "white martyr," which consisted in a couple going to bed nude and interlaced, but resisting the natural solicitations of love. The current of the Free-Spirit gave to the exercise a more human meaning by changing it into a patient refinement of the desire that was not satisfied before it became irresistible. It is probable that certain apostles of Segarelli conformed more willingly to the latter version of martyrdom, denuded of excessive rigor.

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[391] E. Aegerter, *Joachim of Fiore: L'Evangile eternel,* Paris, 1928; J.C. Huck, *Joachim of Fiore und die joachimistiche Literatur,* Freiburg-en-Brisgau, 1938.

[392] *Chronica fratris Salimbene,* in *Monumenta Germaniae scriptores,* XXXVII, I, pp. 255 *sq.*

[393] *Ibid.*

Salimbene was surprised that Segarelli refused to assume the role of community leader, although he was the object of a great veneration. Sincerely devoted to the Christic myth, he deemed it offensive to his holiness if he governed rather than radiated. Nevertheless, he couldn't avoid all forms of power.

Guidone Putagi, brother of the Podesta of Bologna, took control of the government of the congregation and would exercise it for many years, despite an ostentatious way of life, little in conformity with evangelical requirements.

A schism was declared, which degenerated into armed struggle in which each camp disputed Segarelli, a most unfortunate God in his successive incarnations and attempts to once again assist in the birth of a Church.

Guidone's partisans carried him off, but shortly afterwards, he left the brotherhood and rallied to the Order of the Templars. (His adherence to the order of the Temple left the road open to calculations on the opening of the [age of the] spirit by the future victims of Philippe the Beautiful and Clement V. Merchants and bankers two centuries ahead of their time, they did not reject scorn for received ideas, nor for the pleasures that cynically camouflaged the exemplary reputations of the soldiers and businessmen who were above suspicion.)

In 1286, Pope Honorius IV condemned the Segarellist apostolics, refused to receive them or give them alms from the Vatican coffers.

A year later, the Council of Wurzburg enjoined the faithjful to no longer welcome nor feed the wandering apostolics dressed in extravagant clothing and called *leccatores, ghiottoni,* or *scrocconi,* that is to say, "gluttons."[394]

Segarelli (again according to Salimbene) was increasingly eccentric. Three of his disciples, accused of debauchery, were hanged in Bologna so that there would be no doubts about their holy calling, which had been so loudly proclaimed.

Thrown into prison, Segarelli owed his salvation to the Bishop of Parme, who offered him refuge in his house. Nevertheless, a new bull issued in 1290 by Pope Nicolas IV relaunched the repression. In 1294, on the entreaties of the Inquisition, two men and two women who were members of the congregation were put on the pyre. That same year, and so as to to take by surprise an institution that was unanimously abhorred, the episcopal authorities — including civil power and certain ecclesiastical dignitaries — brought before it the prophet whose downfall Rome had sworn and whom it condemned to perpetual imprisonment.

This does not even mention the fierceness of the religious police. The actions engaged in by the Inquisition would involve the condemnation of Gerardo Segarelli to death, forty years after his divine revelation. With him perished many of his partisans, including Etienne, one of his principle evangelists.

Among those who, on 18 July 1300, contemplated the prophet in his tunic of flames, one of his partisans, Dolcino of Novara, would bring to Joachimism the modern form of a social and peasant-based revolution, inaugurating a tradition that would continue to exist until the decline of the colonies in the Twentieth Century.

[394]R. Vaneigem, *Le Mouvement du libre-espirit,* Paris, 1986, p. 73. [*Translator's note*: cf. Raoul Vaneigem, The Movement of the Free Spirit, translated by Randall Cherry and Ian Paterson (Zone Books, New York), pp. 80–81.]

The Guillelmites

At the same that Segarelli was agitating Parme and attracting the hostility of a Church that was clouded by the accumulation of capital, a millenarianist group founded in Milan claimed for women the privilege of guiding humanity as a whole towards the Third Age and the egalitarian kingdom.

In the prophetic year 1260, a young widow and her son arrived in Milan. Guiglelma, said to be from Bohemia, seems to have been the daughter of Constance, wife of the king of Bohemia. Nothing authenticates such parentage other than the declaration of one of her disciples, Andrea Saramita, who had been to see Constance in the hope of recovering a debt. Soon thereafter her exemplary piety attracted followers, whose numbers grew with her reputation as a thaumaturge and the multiplication of miraculous recoveries. The cult of the saint was soon made a part of the whirlpool of fashionable messianic ideas. Her sectarians let it be understood that she had been chosen to convert the Jews and the Saracens, and to instaurate the universality of the Christian faith.

Around 1276, a gilded legend supported the idea that Guiglelma was the incarnation of the Holy-Spirit, designated the harbinger of the Third Age by Joachim of Fiore. She was incarnated as the third in the Trinity as the Christ had been the incarnation of the second in the body of a man. Her nature was at once divine and natural, if one believes two of her more zealous partisans, Andrea Saramita, a notable from Milan, and an *umiliata* in the ancient convent of Biassono, the sister of Maifreda di Pirovano, who belonged to the powerful Visconti family. Guiglelma had the prudence to openly contest such a pretense, which made her subject to inquisitorial control, but, with or without her consent, her role as saint inscribed itself in the double signification of millenarianism and feminine preeminence, which — from the Cistercian Monials to Hadewijch and Porete — did not cease to disturb the Church.

When Guiglelma died, on 24 August 1281, she left her goods to the Cistercian community of Chiaravalle, near Milan, where she was buried in a great luxury of piety. The cult organized in her honor did profitable business. A month after the transfer of her remains, Andrea Samarita, with great pomp, exhumed the body. She washed it with wine and water, and preserved the precious mix as a cream for the healing of the sick. Maifredo used it as a cure for pilgrims; she also instaurated new ceremonies for the anniversary of Guiglelma's death and the transfer of the saint. The abbey, whose prestige grew year by year, attracted the favor of generous donors. One of them, Giaccobe of Novati, a nobleman from Milan, bequeathed to it all of his goods and offered his powerful protection to the Guillelmites.

It was now necessary for the group to claim that it constituted the kernel of a new Church, marking the advent of the reign of the saints. Andrea, spiritual daughter of Guiglelma, devoted herself to defining a new dogma. The Archangel Raphael announced to the blessed Constance that the Holy-Spirit was incarnated in her; she chose feminine form because, under masculine form, she'd perished as the Christ, and the entire world with him. The tomb of Chiaravalle was raised to the glory of Saint-Sepulcre; rites were prescribed and communion was held in it.

From time to time, Guiglelma would appear to the faithful in the form of a dove. The gospels were replaced by Andrea's writings, which imitated Paul's epistles. Maifreda, the author of litanies and prayers, prophesizd the second coming of Guiglelma and the end of the traditional papacy. She herself would become a pope. She worked to form a cardinal college exclusively composed of women. Sumptuously dressed, she gave her benediction, celebrated Mass, consecrated the Host, and gave communion to the faithful.

The support of a number of rich Milanese, including the Visconti family, in all probability explains the slowness and hesitations of the Inquisition. It was disquieted by the Guillelmites in 1284, but contented itself with a simple admonishment. The inquests of 1295 and 1296 were not followed up

upon. However, at the time Maifreda revived the millenarian danger by announcing the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost 1300, the Church decided to intervene in a center of agitation that had consolidated the front of apostolics, Fraticelles, Dolcinites and heterdox Beghards.

Among the Guillelmites who were arrested, four or five were condemned as relapsers. On 23 August 1300, Sister Giaccoa dei Bassani mounted the pyre. In September, it was the turn of Andrea Saramita and Maifreda. Lighter penalties were given to the others. Guiglelma's remains were exhumed[395] and burned. Thus ended a schism that opposed to the patriarchal Church the will to found a feminine Church and that brought a gynecratic constitution to millenarianist hopes. It would not be until the Sixteenth Century that the idea of salvation through women would appear (in the writings of Guillaume Postel).

Dolcino Of Novara

In Dolcino of Novara was incarnated the millenarianist aspirations of the urban areas and the old collectivist dreams of the peasant commune, according to a covergence that, up to the Twentieth Century, would govern the archaic and modern meanings of economic, political and social revolution. Remarkable for his intelligence, courage and sincerity, Dolcino offered to seven centuries of history one of the first and noblest revolutionary figures to attempt to instaurate a new society.

Originally from the region of Novara, Dolcino was the son of a certain Giulio, a priest in Trentano in the valley of Ossola or a hermit from Prato near Novara. Another priest, Agosto, attached to the church of Saint-Anges in Verceil, took charge of his education and trusted him with a pedagogue named Ziona. His brilliant spirit attracted animosity. A calumnious imputation accused him of stealing from his protector, driving him from Verceil. Perhaps he then joined a wandering group of apostolics, Fraticelles or Beghards, adepts of Segarelli. His prestige and eloquence rallied to him a large number of partisans. Carried to the head of the Segarellist movement, he drafted a new version of Joachimite doctrine.

The past was divided into three periods. The first covered the centuries of the Old Testament; the second extended from the coming of the Christ to Pope Sylvestre and situated itself under the sign of penitence; the third ran from Sylvestre to Segarelli, marked by the decadence of the Church that no reform succeeded in saving: not that of Benoit, nor the attempts of Dominique and Francis of Assisi. The fourth period, inaugurated in 1260, would procede towards the annihilation of the corrupt Church, the end of monks and priests, and the triumph of the poor and humble, the only carriers of the Holy Spirit and a new fraternal and egalitarian society.

Like all the prophets, Dolcino made the error of fixing a precise date — [in his case, it was] in three years, that is, in 1303 — for the universal upheaval from whence would burst forth the light of the terrestrial kingdom. Politically, Dolcino bet upon Frederic II, enemy of the papacy, on whom it fell to accomplish the designs of divine justice.

According to the *Apocalypse attributed to John* and Bogomilist tradition, as well, Dolcino identified the angels of the seven Churches: Sylvestre for Pergame, Benoit for Ephesus, Dominique for Laodicea, Francis for Sardes, Segarelli for Thyatire and Dolcino himself for Philadelphia. (At the same time, Guion of Cressonaert, friend of Marguerite Porete, also called himself the angel of Philadelphia.)

[395] *Translator's note*: this doesn't make sense unless, after Andrea Samarita exhumed Guiglelma's body and "washed it with wine and water, and preserved the precious mix as a cream for the healing of the sick," she buried it again.

The course of events contradicted Dolcino's short-term prophecies. Boniface VIII died in 1303, the victim of the brutalities to which he subjected Nogaret and Colonna, mandated by Philippe the Beautiful, King of France. Frederic did not manifest himself and the new pope, Benoit XI, was chased from Rome by the Colonna faction, took refuge in Perugia and did not temper the zeal of the Inquisitors against the Dolcinists.

A second epistle from Dolcino pushed back the date of the end of the Church of Rome by two or three years. In 1304, Benoit XI perished unexpectedly, no doubt with the aid of a posion; Frederic still hadn't shown up. Clement V, enemy of the Beghards of Free-Spirit, proclaimed his resolution to finish off the Dolcinist movement.

At the head of some 4,000 men, Dolcino — accompanied by his friend, the rich and beautiful Marguerite of Trente — commanded a staff of experienced men, such as Alberto of Cimega, Longino Cattaneo of Bergamo, Federigo of Novara, and Valderigo of Brescia. Dolcino then began a guerrilla campaign that baffled his enemies with its great mobility, winning Bolgone, Modena and Northern Italy, especially the regions around Bergamo, Brescia, Milanm and Como. Arrested three times by the Inquisition, he escaped [each time]. He ended up establishing himslf in the region neighboring Novara and Verceil, where the peasant populations regrouped themselves under his leadership into a veritable peasant revolt.

Milano Sola, a rich [property] owner from Borgo di Sesia, offered to house Dolcino, but the pressure brought by the armies levied by Saint-Siege incited him to search in the mountains of Valsesia for a better refuge. In 1305, Mount Balmara and then the Parete Calvo, snowy and difficult-to-reach summits in the Alps, were erected as fortified camps for a population of 1,400 people, organized as a commune.

Around the couple formed by Dolcino and Marguerita, the partisans were called to lay down the bases for a new world in which the goods for survival were collectivized, property was abolished and marriage — which reduced women to objects of appropriation — was suppressed in the name of the "union according to the heart." Dolcino recommended the practice of nudity among couples, refining the gestures of love until irresistible desire accomplished the will of nature in an innocence that revoked all guilt.

Clement V assimilated the struggle against the Dolcinists into a crusade enriched by indulgences. Through threats and promises, the people of Valsesia were forced to adhere to a line destined to prevent all aid to those who were besieged. Pushed by deprivation, Dolcino's partisans' raids and pillages alienated the sympathies of the villagers who had been initially won over to their cause, but the presence of enemy troops added to both the increasing misery and the ordinary cowardices to be found in such situations.

Nevertheless, the audacity of Dolcino turned in his favor a situation judged to be disastrous. The Podesta of Varallo, who fell into the hands of the Dolcinists after trying to seize the Parete Calvo, was exchanged with his troops for an important shipment of supplies.

On 10 March 1306, after a year-long stay in the cold and scarcity, the Dolcinists abandoned a retreat that was dooming them to a slow annihilation and succeeded in taking up a new position on Mount Rubello, near the village of Treverio in the Verceil region. Badly armed and weakened, their numbers did not exceed a thousand, but they nevertheless managed to break two offensives launched by the Bishop of Verceil. Pushed by famine, Dolcino provoked the enemy into battle, throwing itself into a hasardous confrontation from which he emerged the victor, capturing prisoners whom he exchanged for supplies.

Clement V then issued several Bulls of Crusade, promised tax reductions and advantages for all the [religious] orders, and obtained military reinforcements from Lombardy, Piemont and the Count of

Savoie. To the blockade [of Dolcino's position], Clement V added siege machines and the weapons of experienced mercenaries.

Drafting *The Divine Comedy,* (*) Dante Alighieri didn't hide the sympathies that Dolcino's guerrilla war aroused in him. Dante put Dolcino on guard against the tactic of falling back in a climate that worked against him and deprived him of the advantages that had assured him the mobility of his seasoned and well-nourished troops.

(*) The Inferno, Purgatory and Paradise correspond to the three Joachimite ages. The three degrees of the *Scala perfectionis* participated in both the alchemical process and the quest for "refined love."

At the start of winter, a battle that turned to carnage saw the Dolcinists victorious again. The blockade and the rigors of the cold where the real reasons for their heroism. On 23 March 1307, the assault exhausted the last resistance.

Clement V would show his relief by giving out prebends and fiscal compensation to the Crusaders. His resentment prescribed him to inflict the most odious punishments upon Dolcino, Marguerite and their friends. Dragged through the streets of Verceil, Dolcino was — like many arrestees on the way to the pyre — carved up alive with the aid of red-hot pinchers. Witnesses recounted that Dolcino did not let out a cry.

Bernard Gui, one of the most ignoble men ever produced by inquisitorial fanaticism, vowed on his life to pursue the Dolcinists. They were burned in Toulouse in 1322, along with Pierre de Lugo, who was originally from Galice; in Trente in 1332 and 1333; in Compostelle, where the disciples of the Italian Dolcinist Richard were condemned in the manner of Bernard Gui; in Prague in 1305; in Rietti in 1335, despite the municipal authorities, who refused to deliver the Dolcinists to the Inquisition; in England; in Padua in 1350; in Avignon, under John XXII; in Naples in 1372; and in Germany at the beginning of the Fifteenth Century.

Although it was led by the parish priest Guillaume Cale, the great peasant revolt was encumbered by few religious considerations. Moreover, it involved more rioting and tumult than a politically organized plan and a programme of precise demands. The peasant movement led by John Ball in England in the second half of the Thirteenth Century enjoyed the sympathy of the Lollards but, beyond Ball's preaching and his celebrated question "While Adam dug and Eve spun, where was the nobleman?" the religious connotations remained absent. Same with the revolt led by Watt Tyler and the many popular insurrections that split the great cities. Millenarianism, still impregnated with the sacred spirit, did not reappear until the Anabaptists of Munster. It would fascinate thinkers such as Campanella and Weitling, a contemporary of Marx. The great revolutionary movements gave to millenarianism a more ideological than religious form — nevertheless, it would be a mistake to underestimate the role of irrational and Joachimite faith in Nazi millenarianism,[396] that is, in the antithesis of the projects of a classless society or an ecological paradise, both carried to consciousness by the successive waves of the economny.[397]

[396] *Translator's note*: here Vaneigem is supporting the central thesis of Norman Cohn, In Pursuit of the Millennium (New York: 1957).

[397] E. Agnanine, *Fra Dolcino*, Florence, 1964.

Chapter 34: The Flagellants

Stoicism taught that one should endure suffering; Judeo-Christianity taught one to love it. From punishment as proof of divine love to the love of punishment was only a step. Did not the markets in dereliction, death and fear count among the most profitable for the Church?

The appearance in Perugia around 1250 of the movement of the Flagellants inscribed itself in a conjuration of events — the famine of 1250, the plague of 1259, the bloody struggle between the Guelphs and the Ghibellins — that was propitious for the nourishment of the sentiment that the displeasure of losing oneself carried the consolation of involving the whole world in that loss. The Joachimite expiration date once more catalyzed the tumult of passions that a impossible life easily turned towards the outlet of death.

At first encouraged by the Church, hysterical and collective self-punishment — due to its pretensions to exclusivity — rapidly came to threaten the privileges of afflicting and consoling reserved by the clergy. The hell claimed for earth removed all credit from the merchants of the beyond. Surrendering oneself to outrages and tormenting the flesh identified one with the Christ and released one from all duties to the Church.

For a long time, flagellation counted among the self-punitive practices admitted by the Church. It expressed the ordinary scorn for terrestrial life and pleasure inherent in all religions, without (for all that) curtailing an existence denuded of attractions by the quest for a sanctifying punishment, as in the New Prophecy or the Cathars' *endura.*

> It was in the crowded Italian towns that organised flagellant processions appeared for the first time. The movement was launched in 1260 by a hermit of Perugia and spread southwards to Rome and northwards to the Lombard cities with such rapidity that to contemporaries it appeared a sudden epidemic of remorse. Led usually by priests, masses of men, youths and boys marched day and night, with banners and burning candles, from town to town. And each time they came to a town they would arrange themselves in groups before the church and flog themselves for hours on end. The impact which this public penance made upon the general population was great. Criminals confessed, robbers returned their loot and usurers the interest on their loans, enemies were reconciled and feuds forgotten. Even the two warring parties which were dividing Italy, the Guelphs or supporters of the Pope and the Ghibellines or the supporters of the Emperor, for a moment lost some of their intransigence. Whole towns became involved in the movement — at Reggio the chief magistrate, the bishop and all the guilds took part. As the processions moved along they constantly increased in size, until they were many thousand strong. But if at times people of all classes would join in, it was the poor who persevered; so that in the latter stages of the movement they alone remained.
>
> The circumstances under which this first outbreak of mass self-flaggellation occurred are significant. Even by medieval standards, conditions in Italy at that moment were exceptionally hard. In 1258 there had been famine, in 1259 a serious outbreak of plague. Above

> all, incessant warfare between Guelph and Ghibelline had reduced the country to a state of the utmost misery and insecurity. The situation of the Guelph towns was particularly desperate, for their cause had just suffered a heavy blow when the Florentines were defeated at Montaperto, with fearful slaughter, by the Tuscan Ghibellines. Frederick II's son, Manfred, seemed well on the way to establishing his sway over the whole of Italy. It was not for nothing that the flagellant movement started in a Guelph city and flourished amongst Guelphs. Yet all these afflictions were felt to be but a prelude to a final and overwhelming catastrophe. A chronicler remarked that during the flagellant processions people behaved as though they feared that as a punishment for their sins God was about to destroy them all by earthquake and by fire from on high. It was in a world which seemed poised on the brink of the abyss that these penitents cried out, as they beat themselves and threw themselves upon their faces: 'Holy Virgin take pity on us! Beg Jesus Christ to spare us!' and 'Mercy, mercy! Peace, peace!' — calling ceaselessly, we are told, until the fields and mountains seemed to echo with their prayers and musical instruments fell silent and love-songs died away.[398]

Through the sentiment of an intolerable existence, from which so often came the obscure wish for universal annihilation, the principle of hope also marked out a path. The phoenix reborn from its cinders. Thus the most diverse traits [and people] were mixed together in the flagellant movement: the refusal of the Church and the clergy; the divine freedom to which the most disinherited (thus those who suffered the most) acceded by right; those who — like the Beghards of Cologne, the Beguines of Schweidnitz and the ancient Messalians — overcame the ordeal of sorrow and entered into the promised land of Edenic happiness; but also those oppressed people whose resentment turned this way and that against the [various] powers and, most often due to the ordinary insanity [*sanie*] of cowardice and sadism, tortured and massacred Jewish men, women and children.

In 1349, the Pope blamed the Flagellants when he declared: "Most of them or their followers, beneath an appearance of piety, set their hands to cruel and impious works, shedding the blood of Jews whom Christian piety accepts and sustains."[399]

In 1261 and 1262, the movement crossed the Alps, went up the Rhine and entered southern Germany, where it took a turn that was more popular, more anti-clerical and more faithful to Joachimite eschatology. The appeals to purity of soul and faith didn't fail to revive the anti-Semitic core, which had been cultivated by Emico of Leningen, the Master of Hungary and an anonymous clergyman from Passau (the author of a chronicle of the second half of the Thirteenth Century that attributed all the world's misfortunes to the Jews and heretics.)

If one participated in a procession of flagellants, the duration of which was 33-and-a-half days (in memory of Christ's age), it was deemed enough to assure one of impeccability whatever one did and, evidently, freedom from the Church and its sacraments. After 1262, the on-going threat to clerical profitability would justify the prohibition announced against the hysterical hordes who exhibited their bloody wounds and pled Christic sorrow in the countrysides and the towns so to be able to devote themselves without sin to coupling, libations, rape and pillage.

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[398] N. Cohn, *Les fanatiques de l'Apocalpyse,* Paris 1983, pp. 134 and 135. [*Translator's note*: here Vaneigem refers to the French translation of Norman Cohn's In Pursuit of the Millennium (New York, 1957), pp. 125–126. Rather than translate Cohn back into English, we have quoted directly from the original.]

[399] *Ibid.,* p. 147. [*Translator's note*: Norman Cohn, In Pursuit of the Millennium, p. 139.]

The Black Plague of 1348–1349 revived the propensity to merciful suffering, on which the Church of the Fifteenth Century would base its lucrative market in death. Possessed by a holy fury, groups of 50 to 500 people paraded in successive waves in Germany, the Netherlands and Hungary, exorcising through an exemplary expiation the just anger with which God overwhelmed his creatures. England, little concerned with a redemption obtained by a cynical, higher bid in misfortune, rejected the flagellant movement.

Repressed in Strasbourg in 1296, Bergamo in 1334, and Cremone in 1346, the Flagellants still managed to invade Bruges, Ghent, Tournai and Dordrecht. The bishops sometimes tolerated them and tried in vain to temper their devastating zeal.

As the excess of horrors accumulating in the 1350s raised suffering to the dignity of supreme good, millenarianism reappeared to be the logical consequence of the project of annihilation conducted by God with a great power of conviction. A mysterious *Celestial Letter,* which no doubt issued from Segarellism, announced the decision of the Lord — as dictated to a prophet by his friends — to exterminate mankind. Angered by the unworthy conduct of his creatures and, in particular, the rich, God would only spare humanity in exchange for a general repentance and a contrition embellished by the whip. One still had to receive clemency through the intercession of Mary. The egalitarianism of the adepts of voluntary poverty was far from the movement of the nobility, which sometimes ceded to penitential solicitations. Did not Clement VI prescribe the virtues of flagellation? He would retract his support and in 1349 condemned the movement, with the result that the messianism of the artisans and peasants would turn to confrontation with the aristocracy, the bourgeoisie and the clergy, the hedonism of which — judged to be contrary to the wishes of God — aroused celestial anger.

Anti-clericalism frequently gave way to anti-Semitism. The pogroms permitted the profitable disposal of the marginals condemned by the disgrace imputed to them by the Church to serve as scapegoats when they ceased to fill the coffers of the bishops and princes. The Jewish communities of Frankfurt, Mayence, Cologne and Brussels were exterminated. (In 1146, Pierre de Cluny could already ask, "What good does it do to go to the end of the world (...) to combat the Saracens when we let live among us other infidels who are guiltier with respect to the Christ than the Mahometans?"[400]

In Thuringa, Konrad Schmid led the millenarianist flagellants. He revived the legend of the return of Frederic, the Emperor of the Last Days, to whom Dolcino imprudently gave a political potential.

Renewing the tradition of the itinerant Christs, Schmid demanded an absolute submission to his person. He decreed that self-flagellation was the prelude to the birth of an Edenic age to come in 1369. The Inquisition would hasten to seize Schmid and burn him in Nordhausen in 1368, one year in advance of the due date.

By reinforcing its repression, Rome would try, as it was accustomed, to recuperate the movement to its profit. The Spaniard Vincent Ferrier, the leader of the penitents, who were severely supervised and controlled, would win his sanctification by giving an orthodox coloration to the stripes of the whip. He was only partially successful. Seeing him overwhelmed on all sides, [Jean Charlier de] Gerson adjured in 1417 by renouncing his stinging apostolate.

From then on, the Inquisition took the initiative. The pyres (principally in Germany) reduced to cinders some 90 flagellants in 1414, 300 in 1416, a dozen in Nordhausen in 1446 and Sonderhausen in 1454. The last victims would succumb around 1480.

the Flagellants' doctrine hardly bothered with theological subtlties. Konrad Schmid advocated a second baptism, a baptism of blood, which conferred [personal] salvation and doomed the Church,

[400]Cited by Delumeau, *La peur en Occident,* Paris, 1978, p. 313.

the clergy and the sacraments to uselessness. The refusal to pay tithes and the denunciation of the trade in indulgences belonged to all the popular movements that the Church did not cease to arouse against it and its clerical bureaucracy. The rejection of the cult of the saints and purgatory would form [Martin] Luther's heritage, as would anti-Semitism, all things considered.

Dominico Savi, also called Mecco Sacconi, burned in 1344 in Scoli, attested to the penetration of Free-Spirit ideas even in the destructive fury of the Flagellants. Indeed, he taught the following theses, here re-transcribed by the spirit of the inquisitors who sentenced him to death.

> Their impudence went as far as saying that pleasure was not a sin; men and women praying together in the obscurity of the night do not commit sin, whatever else they might be doing at the time; it is permitted for women to flagellate themselves for their sins, nude and publicly; lay people also have the faculty of absolving all of their sins.[401]

* * *

Nevertheless, the Church discovered in collective self-flagellation a way of exercising over the populations a form of control, the power of which the official history has always exaggerated. Catholicism only inspired a true devotion in the Fifteenth Century, on the eve of the schism that would amputate half of its empire. Using the fear of death and the horror of a beyond that perpetuated the atrocity of terrestrial destiny, Rome readjusted its control over subjects reduced to the state of sinners.

The Dance of Death or *danses macabres* celebrated with an avenging and egalitarian imagery — since death spins all the social classes in its sinister round — the interminable festival of dead life; and the only recourse was to pay the parish priest (lying in ambush for the last breath) the right of deliverance that gave a salvational meaning to sorrow. There would be great pardons for those who suffered greatly, if they resigned themselves to honor the traits that the Church deducted from every moment of an existence that it subjugated from the cries of birth to the death rattle of [final] agony. Ironically, the Church would impose itself in the Fifteenth Century under the traits of a mother, while death, in its half-emaciated skeleton, took on the figure of Woman according to the patriarchy: an enemy in life, a friend in putrefaction.

[401] R. Guarnieri, *Il morimento del liberto spiritio,* Rome, 1965, p. 427.

Chapter 35: The Fraticelles

The name "Fraticelles" (from the Italian *fraticelli,* sometimes translated in French as *frerots* or the "kid brothers") designated the radical dissidents of the "Spiritual" faction that, in the Franciscan order, opposed to the "Conventual" or orthodox wing the strict vocation of poverty, as prescribed by Francis of Assisi.

Although John XXII applied the term to the Spirituals as a form of polemical malignity, he never seriously attacked the Fraticelles, who were blemished with the same spirit of freedom as the Beghards, Beguines, apostolics and Dolcinists.

Respectful for the original directives of Franciscanism, the Spirituals extolled — in addition to absolute poverty and the refusal of all ecclesiastical ownership — theses that were more and more embarrassing for the Church, which was engaged in the whirlpool of business affairs and already provided with the modern financial power that had hardly begun the decline of its political and spiritual authority in the Twentieth Century. Three men took the lead in the fight against pontifical politics: Angelo Clareno (Peter of Fossombrone), Pierre-Jean Olieu or Olivi, and Ubertino of Casale. Angelo Clareno gave an historical account of the conflict in his *History of the Tribulations.*

According to him, Crescentius — general of the order from 1244 to 1248 and successor of Elie of Cortone — showed "the same avidity for riches and science, the same aversion for the poor convents scattered in solitude, which he changed into sumptuous monasteries; around Crescentius, the brothers chased after testaments summoning their debtors to justice, devoted themselves to schools of dialectics, neglected prayer and Scripture in favor of the useless curiosities of Aristotle."[402] Brother Bonadies, jurisconsulate and adjoint of the general, "drank fraud and lied like water." He observed with a malevolent eye the growing sect of Spirituals "who do not walk, he thinks, according to the truth of the Gospel, scorning the rules of the order, believing themselves better than the others, living in their manner, relating everything to the Spirit and even wearing cloaks that are too short."[403]

Innocent IV, then at war with Frederic II, would give Crescentius permission to pursue the dissidents and destroy to the roots "their occasions for schism and scandal in the order." The ascension of John of Parme to the head of the order restored power to the Spirituals for a time, but their sympathies for Joachimite theories and the reforms of Segarelli offered their enemies the occasion to amalgamate the austere Spirituals and the "libertarian" party of the Fraticelles.

After exile in Armenia between 1290 and 1293, an autonomous group led by Liberat (Peter of Macerata) and Angelo Clareno obtained the protection of Pope Celestine V and, in 1294, they formed the *Pauperes heremitae domini Caelestini.* In vain, because Celestine's successor, Boniface VIII, had the greatest interest in the temporal preoccupations of the Church. He condemned the Spirituals, threw into prison the poet Jaropone da Todi, who — converted to voluntary poverty after the accidental death of his wife (which did not prevent him from comparing women to serpents and Satan) — had joined Angelo Clareno's friends.

[402] Clareno, *Historia septem tribulationum* (ALKM).
[403] Cited in Cantu, *L'Italie mystique,* p. 198.

Libertat and his adepts took refuge in Archaie, then Thessalia. Upon the death of Libertat, Angelo Clareno took the lead of the Spirituals and returned to Italy. One of his partisans, the physician and alchemist Arnaud of Villeneuve, convinced Clement V to reconcile the two rival tendencies.

Ubertino of Casale, leader of the Spirituals in Tuscanny, went to Avignon to confront the leaders of the Conventual faction, Bonagrazia of Bergamo and Raymond of Fronsac. It is not useless to recall that Ubertino estimated it good not to incur any reproach for having guilty sympathies for the Fraticelles, because as an Inquisitor he had raged against the Franciscan partisans of the Free-Spirit in the Spolete region. Arnaud himself did not disdain from anathematizing a doctrine so contrary to religion. The conciliation ran aground because the Conventuals did not know at what point the progress of the economy comforted the power of the Roman Church and its then-uncertain control over nations and principalities.

The ascension of John of Cahors, the redoutable businessman of the pontificat, under the name John XXII, gave the signal for the repression to begin. The same reprobation fell upon the Spirituals, Fraticelles, Dolcinists, Beghards and partisans of the Free-Spirit, who Clement V condemned at the Council of Vienna in 1311.

The Pope ordered that the sovereigns among whom the Spirituals had sought refuge expell them as heretics. The bull *Sancta romana* attributed the official denomination "Fraticelles" to them for the first time.

Arrested in Avignon and then freed, Angelo Clareno precipitously left for Italy, where in 1318 he rallied partisans to the thesis that the Christ and his disciples possessed nothing. At the Chapter of Perugia in 1322, he obtained important support in the person of Michel of Cesene, general minister of the Franciscan order, who held the absolute destitution of Jesus and the apostles to be "holy and Catholic" dogma. (To combat the thesis of the Spirituals using iconographic propaganda, the Church would recommend that painters represent Jesus and the apostles equipped with a purse.)

This directly challenged the interests of the Church, the tributary of capitalist development that slowly freed itself from the agrarian mode of production. Soon one saw the Joachimite legend return in force, rewritten and adapted for the people of the time. John XXII, leader of the "carnal Church," was stigmatized as the "mystical Antichrist."

The Antichrist, scorning the reformers and their preoccupation with the sordid aspects of life [*miserabilisme*], retorted with a very astute manoeuvre.

While Francis of Assisi prescribed that Saint-Siege retain all of the order's furniture, the Pope decided to transfer it to the Franciscans, entrusting them with an arrangement that would also transform them willy-nilly into [property] owners. At the same time, his Bull dated 12 November 1323, *Cum inter nonnullos,* condemned as heretical the theses of Michel of Cesene, who also took refuge with his friends under the auspices of Emperor Louis of Bavaria.

Angelo Clareno went into exile in Basilicate, where he continued to lead his party until his death in 1337.

The Spirituals would remain active in the region of Naples, in Sicily (to which the Tuscan group of Henri of Ceva withdrew) and in Tabriz, Armenia.

It would be among the adepts of Monte Maiella that the Roman tribune Cola di Rienzo would be welcomed after his first failure.

In the eyes of the Church, there no longer existed a single Franciscanism, that of the "Observants." The dissidents fell under the inquisitorial label "Fraticelles of Opinion," opinion here designating the theses of voluntary poverty.

Bernard Delicieux

On 7 May 1318, the first victims of Franciscan orthodoxy perished on the pyres of Marseille. That same year, the Inquisition condemned to perpetual prison one of the rare, if not the only public and openly declared adversary of the Catholic and Roman police.

Born in Montpellier in 1260 and entered into the Franciscan order in 1284, Bernard Delicieux soon made himself the spokesman of the populations of Toulouse, Carcassonne and Razes, indignant about the machinations of the Inquisition and the barbarity of the Dominicans. In Carcassonne he led a riot that seized the citadel and freed the heretics held in the official "wall" or "prison."

It was part of his intentions to appeal to the justice of the King of France, more generous in matters of faith but, implicated in a conspiracy (which was real or mere intrigue designed to bring him down), he would attract the disgrace of Philippe the Beautiful. The King had hanged the consuls of Carcassonne, Limoux and Razes; his despotic nature did not support the politics of communal autonomy. Reprieved in 1307, Bernard fell in 1313 into the net patiently woven by inquisitorial vindictiveness. He was accused of having attempted to poison the Pope with the complicity of Arnaud of Villeneuve. The crudeness of the accusation aroused reservations; he would only escape the pyre by dying in 1320, after two years of incarceration in the jail of God's executioners, whose infamy he had denounced. It would only be in the Sixteenth Century, with Sebastian Castellion, that a second voice in the world concert would demand the abrogation of the death penalty for crimes of belief.

Prous Boneta

In 1325, the Inquisition seized Prous Boneta, venerated by the Spirituals for her courage and humanity. Imprisoned in 1315 in Montpellier, she resolved — as soon as she was freed — to give her help to the persecuted Spirituals with her sister Alissette.

In 1320, Prous was seized by visions, similar to those of Hadewijch, Mechtilde of Madgebourg and Teresa of Avila. Later, she had an ecstatic encounter with the Christ. Maundy Thursday, he breathed his *pneuma* into her and promised her she would give birth to the Holy Spirit that would inaugurate the Third Age. According to her own version of Joachimism, Elie was Francis of Assisi and Henoch was Olivi.

The power given to the Christ by God ended from the moment that Olivi was invested with the Holy Spirit: the papacy ceased to exist, the sacraments and confession fell into desuetude. Thenceforth, contrition effaced sin, without need of either penitences or priests.

Rising up against the massacre of the Spirituals and the lepers, unjustly accused of posioning water sources in 1321 and 1322, whom she compared to the Innocents (the alleged victims of Herod), Prous Boneta offered all the traits of a perfect victim to the eyes of the Inquisitor of Carcassonne, Henri of Chamay. She did not repudiate any of her convictions in front of the tribunal and was delivered to the flames in 1325.[404]

In Avignon, the celebrated troubadour Raimon of Cornet barely escaped the pyre in 1326. The same fate was narrowly escaped by Jean de la Rochetaillade (Juan de Pera Tallada, better known to alchemists as Rupescisse). Professing Joachimite opinions, this friend of Arnaud of Villeneuve and the Spirituals compared the Church to a bird born without feathers, which strips the plumage from all other birds so as to dress itself in pride and tyranny.

[404]H.C. Lea, *Histoire de l'Inquisition au Moyen Age,* Paris, 1900, p. 49.

While the trials of the Spirituals multiplied in number, Free-Spirit and libertarian comportments were more often incriminated. Most often this meant the ordinary calumnies by which popes, ecclesiastical dignitaries and inquisitors imputed their own debauchery and erotic fantasms to the poor ascetics. The Spirituals had always fought the Fraticelles and nothing permits one to suspect the martyrs of Franciscan rigor — such as Francesco of Pistoia, burned in Venice in 1337, John of Castillon and Francis of Arquata, executed in Avignon in 1354, and Michel Perti, reduced to cinders in Florence in 1389 — of taking libidinous liberties.

In 1341, John XXII definitively confirmed the act of dissolution of the dissident group, doomed to extermination. Due to one of the aftershocks that often bring people penetrated by infamy to their downfall, this Pope, who was sensitive to the odor of burning fagots — he had the Bishop of Cahors (his home town) skinned alive and burned — , suddenly reiterated the doctrine of Pelage on the innocence of newborns and the uselessness of baptizing them. A council notified him of the silence concerning a matter so profitable for the Church's interests, which he had always defended vehemently. Scared to hear from his mouth such manifestly heretical remarks, the conciliatory fathers deposed him and discretely put him to death.

Bentivenga Da Gubio

He became one of the members of the Franciscan Observance — an order invested at the beginning of the inquisitorial missions, the Franciscans being reputed to act with less ferocity than the Dominicans — so to impose a final solution to what John XXII called the "pestilential plague of Fraticellianism."

Unlike the Spirituals accustomed to asceticism, the Fraticelles were most often confused with the Beghards and the apostolics of Free-Spirit. Such was the case with Bentivenga da Gubio.

In Parme, Bentivenga adhered to the apostolic group of Gerard Segarelli until the episcopal prohibition of 1281, which provoked the dispersion of the adepts. He then joined the Minorites (minor brothers or Franciscans) and in Ombria rallied the partisans of Free-Spirit, who were numerous in the region. Before his arrival, there was in Spolete, around a certain Ottonello, a *Congregatio Libertatis* that was fought by Jacopo da Bevagna, whom Claire of Montfaucon would much later suspect of [being] Free-Spirit. His influence was such that the Flagellants passing through the valley abandoned their procession to discover the effects of pleasure freed from suffering.

Conceit would incite Bentivenga to expound his theories to Claire of Montfaucon, then sanctified. She delivered him to the Inquisition with six other Minorites. Ubertino of Casale, part of the Spiritual current, had already taken him to task in his *Arbor vitae crucifixae Jesu.* He reproached him for ideas "inspired by the Devil to corrupt the spirit of the simple people." He summarized those ideas thus:

> 1. Apathy: an impious deception has appeared, inspired by the Enemy, which corrupts the spirits of the simple people, according to which they must — under the pretext of serenity in the will of God — remain as insensitive to the Passion of the Christ as the suffering of anyone else, and rejoice only in the pleasure of God, without caring if one offends God or anyone else. And they say, 'God guides all towards the best of the choices.'
>
> 2. Impeccability: they say that men who have the grace of God and charity can not sin. They affirm that those who sin in some fashion have never had charity nor the grace of God.

> 3. From the quite true principle of the death of the Son — we can do nothing good without grace — they infer that, whatever we do, it is through grace. For this reason, they say that eating and making love and other, similar things are not due to faults in us, because grace — they are assured — incites these things.[405]

In the summer of 1307, Bentivenga was condemned to life in prison in Florence.

Paolo Zoppo

In Rieti, the Inquisitor Simone da Spoleto began in 1334 a procedure against a group of Fraticelles united around Paolo Zoppo. Robert of Arbrissel called the ordeal that consisted in sleeping nude between two nude women and triumphing over the desire to make love the "white martyr"; Zoppo himself practiced with a widow and her servant a style of caresses in which delays imposed upon the "*amor extaticus*" were related to the tantric method of illumination obtained by sexual tension. The same delayed pleasure was practiced by the *Homines Intelligentiae* [Men of Intelligence] in Brussels and the *Alumbrados* or "Illuminati" of Spain. Paolo Zoppo and his companions paid with life in prison for wanting to substitute for the ordinary, cunning and brutal debauchery of the convents the refinement of amorous pleasure and the celebration of women, creators of all joy.[406]

At the time of the trial in Rieti, it appeared that the Fraticelles envisioned electing a Pope who would be opposed to the "Antichrist John XXII." Angelo Clareno himself recommended giving the pontificat to Philippe of Majorca, which was attested to by Francis Vanni of Assisi.

In 1419, the Inquisitor Manfred of Verceil reported that the Fraticelles of Opinion — particularly numerous in Florence, Tuscanny and the region around Rome — refused to submit to Martin V because they had their own Pope. When Nicolas V tasked the Inquisition with proceeding against the Fraticelles who had taken refuge in Athens in 1451, he specially recommended the capture of the one who passed for Pope.

The Extermination Trial Of The Fraticelles

Tasked by Martin V in 1418 and 1426 and by Eugene IV in 1432 with pitilessly pursuing the Fraticelles, Jacques de la Marche and John of Capistrano — both honored with the title of saint for their good inquisitorial services — burned 36 rebel residences and multiplied bookburnings. The hatred that they aroused in the people was such that they had to ceaselessly protect themselves against assassination attempts.

In 1449, new pyres were lit in Florence. In 1452, the same year in which Jerome Savonarola was born, Jacques de la Marche published his *Dialogue against the Fraticelles,* in which he retraced the extermination-trial of Maiolati.

There had been a community of Fraticelles of Free-Spirit ever since 1410 or 1420. A bell at the church carried the inscription, dated 1429: "Brother Gabriel, Bishop of the Church of Philadelphia, (*) parish priest and general minister of the minor brothers."

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[405] R. Vaneigem, *Le Mouvement du libre-espirit, op. cit.* [*Translator's note*: cf. R. Vaneigem, *The Movement of the Free-Spirit* (New York: Zone Books, 1986), p. 128.]

[406] F. Ehrle, *Die Spiritualen, ihr Verhaltnis zum Franziskanerorde und ze den Fraticelle,* ALKG IV, 1888, pp. 78 *sq.*; L. Fumi, *Bolletino di storia patria per l'Umbria,* V, 1899, pp. 349–382.

(*) A century earlier, a friend of Marguerite [Porete] called himself the angel of Philadelphia.

The minutes of the trial were inspired by the accusations Epiphanius once made against the Barbelites (the Inquisitors used it without scruple against the Vaudois and the Cathars): men and women meeting at night, chanting hymns, "extinguishing the candles and rushing to each other according to chance. The children issued from such commerce were brought before the assembly; one passed them hand-to-hand in a round until they died. The one in whose hands they died was elected the great pontiff. They burned one of the babies and threw the cinders in a vessel into which they poured wine; they made those initiated into their brotherhood drink from it. They fought against the ownership of goods and believed that the faithful did not need to engage any magistrates and that the souls of the fortunate would only see God after the resurrection."[407] Thus did Pierre Bayle recount the trial in his *Dictionary.* He did not believe in a practice often used to justify the cruelest repressions and that the Inquisitors called the "*barilotto*" [keg or barrel]. The propaganda cunningly conducted so as to bring the discredit of pious souls upon the unfortunate Fraticelles would exercise its ravages upon public opinion with a durable effect, since popular language would for a long time afterwards conserve the insulting expression "*Tu sei nato dal barilotto*" ("You were born from a *barilotto*").

For all that, Bayle estimated that a strong probability existed that this Fraticelle community led a joyous life for 30 years, managing a terrestrial existence as luxurious and luxuriant as possible, with the approval of the heavens, and in the absence of the guilt that gnawed at the tormented hedonism of the powerful. The rage of the two Holy Inquisitions was only exacerbated. A great expiatory blaze illuminated the sinister depths of their consciences.[408]

In 1466, a group of Fraticelles arrested and tortured in Assisi confirmed — upon the insistence of the inquisitors — the existence of the *barilotto* in Poli near Tivoli, in the Marches and in Maiolati. The sect, known under the name "The Truth," which had anarchronistically Freemasonic connotations, propagated lampoons in which the ideas of the Free-Spirit were expounded.[409]

As among the Beghards of Cologne, the solicitation to love was expressed by the formula "*Fac mihi caritatem*" ("Give me charity"), *caritas* here re-finding its original meaning of "love of the next person," *carus,* "beloved."

The Fraticelles disappeared from the Inquisition's registers, but a popular fable has it that, entrenched in the deep valleys and forests, they continued fantastic convents that haunted the tormented imaginations of the readers of de Sade, Lewis, Ann Radcliff, Walpole and the gothic novel.

[407] P. Bayle, *Dictionnaire,* art. "Fraticelli."
[408] Oliger, *op. cit.*; Guarnieri, p. 476; Ehrle, *op. cit.,* p. 78 and *sq.*
[409] F. Ehrle, *op. cit.,* pp. 127, 137 and 180.

Chapter 36: The Eastern Reformers: the Hussites and Taborites

Rome discovered in Bohemia a source of considerable riches. Half the land belonged to the clergy, which — exploiting it in the name of the Christ — aroused a popular hatred more lively than anywhere else, if that was possible.

In 1360, the ascetic reformer Jan Milic denounced in Prague the corruption of the Church, the veritable incarnation of the Antichrist, and vainly exhorted the priests to the voluntary poverty characterized as evangelical.

Upon the death of Milic, his disciple, Matthew of Janov, pursued his reforms. He opposed to the "body of the Antichrist," served in the form of the Host during the communion of the corrupted Church, the eucharist of the *Ekklesia,* the true Church of the faithful. The commensality of the bread and the wine, (*) which Janov opposed to the abstract and mechanical ritual of the clerical communion, explained the exacerbation of the eucharistic quarrels in Bohemia during the Hussite, Taborite and Adamitic wars.

(*) The communion under the two kinds [*especes*] was started as a symbol hostile to Catholicism, in which one communed under a single kind.

Around 1380, the reformist doctrines of Wycliffe — in favor of which worked the clever hostility of England with respect to Roman power — began to spread.

John Huss, an admirer of Wycliffe, suddenly brought to his preaching a universal turn towards critiques that were until then cantonized within the limits of nationalist claims. The prestige attached to his function as Rector of the University of Prague conferred upon his voice an import that made it echo everywhere in Europe. He proved it when John XXII summoned to Prague the emissaries charged with preaching a crusade against his personal enemy, the King of Naples, and collected the funds necessary for the enterprise through a promotional sale of indulgences. In the name of the sacred Scriptures, Huss rose up against the cynicism of the Pope and condemned an attitude unworthy of Christian teachings.

Huss was neither a heretic nor a revolutionary. He simply pushed honesty to the point of imprudence when he denounced the economic and financial politics of the Church. His presumption incited him to bet upon King Wenceslas, who was favorable to him, but whose more powerful interests would divert him from his fate.

Excommunicated and summoned to the Council of Constance in 1414, Huss would respond accompanied by his disciple, Jerome of Prague, and thanks to safe-conduct guaranteed by Emperor Sigismond. He defended his thesis in front of the Council: the Christ was the leader of the Church, not the Pope. The council decided in his favor on one point: it deposed Pope John XXII (*) for simony, murder, sodomy and fornication, complaints that, all things considered, could have been made against the majority of the pontifical sovereigns.[410]

[410]N. Cohn, p. 226. [*Translator's note*: here Vaneigem refers to the French translation of Norman Cohn's In Pursuit of the Millennium (New York, 1957), p. 219.]

(*) In the Twentieth Century, so as to efface the memory of a Pope who did not count among the worst, another was given the title John XXIII.

On the other hand, the ecclesiastical dignitaries did not let themselves be stripped of their lucrative apostolic functions. Led by the French Cardinal, Pierre d'Ailly, who — a convinced millenarianist — remained attentive to his immediate interests, the councilist fathers excommunicated John and Jerome, and delivered them to the pyre in 1415. Emperor Sigismond, who had counseled Huss to retract his statements, in fact hardly desired that an independent Bohemia be created, the claims for which he perceived underneath the theological arguments. This was a bad calculation, because the executions of Huss and Jerome precipitated the insurrection.

While King Wenceslas broke with the Hussites on the insistence of Pope Martin V and his brother, Emperor Sigismond, the Church of Bohemia passed to secular control and was snatched by Roman domination.

In July 1418, when Wenceslas excluded from the government of Prague the representatives of the working-class [*populaire*] neighborhood of Ville-Neuve, weavers, workers, tailors, brewers and peasants seized the City Hall and defenestrated the new councilors. Under the pretext of hunting the patrician families hostile to John Huss, the uprising inscribed itself properly in the tradition of communalist class-struggles.

The guilds and artisanal confederations expelled the Catholics, expropriated the monasteries and confiscated ecclesiastical riches to the profit of the Council of Prague. Very quickly, the moat between proletarian radicalism and the notables hastily reconverted to Hussism was dug. A moderate party emerged, which, close to the Catholics, nevertheless distinguished itself by communing through bread and wine, that is to say, under two kinds. Its members adopted the name Utraquists.

In 1419, the radical wing of the Hussite movement organized itself on a resolutely autonomous basis. Located on a hill near the chateau of Bechyne, a group of partisans rebaptized the place in the name that the canonical *Gospel attributed to Matthew* brought to eminence by proclaiming that that was where Jesus announced his return before being elevated towards heaven: Mount Tabor.

The Taborites accorded to each person the right to interpret the Scriptures. They rejected purgatory, prayers for the dead, and the cults of the saints and the relics. Like the Vaudois, they refused to take oaths and were against the death penalty. Once more there intermixed (in favor of working-class demands) the themes of voluntary poverty, an egalitarian millenarianism and, in an antagonistic manner, the thrust of the Free-Spirit and the weight of extremist fanaticism.

In 1420, the news that the fire of God was going to descend upon the towns and villages started a great exodus towards the mountains, where five Taborite cities would be erected under divine protection, because "they would not deal with the Antichrist."[411]

The preacher Jan Capek based himself on citations from the Old Testament to massacre the sinners: "Cursed is the man who restrains his sword from spilling the blood of the enemies of the Christ. Each believer must wash his hands in blood."[412] Certain people, such as Peter Chelcicky, faithful to the principle of pacificism, reacted to the hysteria of such remarks and denounced the ruse of Satan, who was clever to suggest to the furious that they were angels tasked with purifying the world.

In March 1420, the truce between Sigismond and the moderate Hussites gave way to a merciless war in which the personality of the Chief Taborite, Jan Zizka, imposed itself. By crushing the German and Hungarian bands, the swords of which had the benediction of Rome, Zizka haloed himself with a

[411] *Ibid.*, p. 232. [*Translator's note*: Norman Cohn, In Pursuit of the Millennium, p. 225.]
[412] *Ibid.*

prophetic glory. It fell to him to instaurate the millennium and to prepare, through the kingdom of the saints, the return of the Christ to earth. The social programme had hardly changed: "All men should live together like brothers, none should be subjected to another."[413] "All the lords, all the nobles and all the knights will be executed and exterminated in the forests as outlaws."[414] As often happened, the first victims of the programme of purgation were less exterior enemies than the radical wing of the Taborites, the Pikarti, who were decimated by Zizka in the name of the holiness of morality.

The collectivism of subsistance instaurated in the Taborite communities did not bother with an organization of the production of goods, and so the Taborites were soon reduced to conducting supply raids. The despoilation of the nobility and the clergy would be succeded by the exploitation of the peasants, who found themselves in a worse situation than under the regime of the lords.

In April 1421, Zizka annihilated the libertarian communities formed by the Pikarti and the Adamites. Nevertheless, their protests of egalitarianism did not cease to spread, and fomented peasant revolts in Bourgogne and Germany, where the peasants' war would become endemic.

In 1430, armed Taborites attacked Leipzig, Bamberg and Nuremburg. Their victories provoked uprisings against the patricians in Mayence, Constance, Weimar and Stettin. Nevertheless, the moderate wing — the Utraquists — seceded and soon passed over to the enemy. In 1434, the Taborites were battered in Lipan by the Ultraquists of Bohemia. This was the signal for a slow debacle that came to an end with the fall of Mount Tabor in 1452. The majority of those rescued from the general massacre would return to pacificism and would found the community of the Moravian Brothers. For all that, the Taborite doctrine did not cease to propagate itself and would continue to keep alive in the towns and countrysides the flame of freedom that found a decrepit world to set on fire.

* * *

Around 1460, when Bohemia had just ended a long civil war, two nobles demonstrated the point at which the expectation of the millennium remained alive. Besides the usual chronological calculations of the Parousia, Janko and Livin of Wirsberg expounded an original conception of God in his relations with the world that he created. Through his imminent return, the Son of Man prepared to save not only humanity but God himself, paralyzed since the beginning of time by the sins of mankind. It was to be delivered from his own suffering that God appealed to the Savior. The idea of a divinity who is nothing without the men whom he created thus pursued its course.

How would this new reign, destined to restore God to his power, begin? With the extermination of the armed forces of the Antichrist: the Pope, his ministers, followed by all of their followers. Only 14,000 people would survive to found the Spiritual Church. The "sword" of the crusade was formed by the old Taborites, generally regrouped into bands of brigands. After the disaster at Munster, Jan van Batenburg would not act otherwise.

Centered in Eger, the movement would even exercise its influence on the Fraticelles of Italy. The year 1467, predicted as the return of the Christ in bloody majesty, would incite the legatee of the Pope to act with determination. Janko would escape the repression; Livin would abjure so as to escape the pyre and would die in the prison of the archbishop of Ratisbonne.

[413] H. Kaminisky *The Free Spirit in the Hussite Revolution,* La Haye, 1962, p. 47.
[414] *Ibid.,* p. 48.

Chapter 37: The Men of Intelligence and the Pikarti of Bohemia

On 12 June 1411, Willem van Hildernissem of the Carmelite order was called before the Inquisitor Henri de Selles, acting on the behalf of the episcopal tribunal of Cambrai. Willem van Hildernissem was accused of playing an important role in a group of Free-Spirit known to Brussels under the name the Men of Intelligence. Formerly a reader of Holy Scriptures at the Carmel of Tirlemont, he found an inspired ally in Gilles of Canter (Gilles the Cantor, Aegidius Cantor), a sexagenarian layman (probably the son of a noble family) who was dead by the time of the trial.

Everything seems to indicate that they shared an interest in the theories of Bloemardine, whose memory remained more vivid than any inquisitor dared to imagine. Ironically, Henri de Selles — attached to the Abbey of Groenendael where Ruysbroeck, the enemy of Bloemardine, died in 1381 — barely escaped a premeditated assassination attempt at a crossing by the partisans of the *Humines Intelligentiae.* In the absence of an execution, a song ridiculing the Inquisitor circulated in Brussels.

The support that the group received from both the working class and the notables (their meetings were held in a tower owned by an alderman) was not foreign to their leniency of judgment. After three years in prison, Willem was allowed out, perhaps due to a conciliation in which he adjured and rejected the most subversive part of Gilles' doctrine.

The Joachimite connotation was made straight off by the very name of the sect. The Third Age was that of the natural intelligence of beings and things, a "scholarly ignorance" in which the innocence of the child and the learning of the total man was joined, a union of *gnosis* and *pistis,* with *pistis* not meaning faith in God but faith in oneself. Gilles of Canter thus said that one day the Holy Spirit inspired him and said to him: "You have arrived at the stage of a child of three years."

In the original, natural state of freedom, there was neither sin, nor guilt, neither spiritual nor temporal authority. The Church, the laws and the sacraments had no meaning; nor did penitence or redemption. The only important thing was the road to perfection on which amorous ecstasy translated the state of perfect humanity (and thus "divinity" in religious language). The adepts of Gilles and Willem thus traveled along — if they desired to — an initiatory road marked by the diverse degrees of amorous pleasure, but each person was free to remain chaste or to give him- or herself up to libertinage.

Well versed in the Holy Scriptures, Willem van Hildernissem was able to justify any behavior with appropriate quotations, because everything was intended by God.

In the "paradise" in which the sectarians reunited without distinction of class or wealth, Gilles of Canter taught a way of making love "that was that of Adam before the Fall." This was probably a [form of] delayed orgasm, without ejaculation, ending up in tantric illumination and the removal of the fear of pregnancy for the women.

The absence of fear and guilt, allied with an art of coming [*jouir*] that authorized the most voluptuous quests in all domains, easily induced the feeling in the spirit of the adepts that they belonged to an elite, without common measure to the mass of contemporaries leading an absurd and frightened life under the shepherd's crook of the lords and the priests.

The prudence employed during the trial, and the derisory rigor of the judgment, suggested the cleverness of the adepts in propagating their doctrines in complete safety, enjoying a great favor in the urban areas and the protection of the notables. Such were the doctrines that the "Pikarti," who left Picardy to radicalize the Taborite revolution, attempted to implant in Bohemia.[415]

The Pikarti, Or The Adamites Of Bohemia

Who were the Pikarti who around 1418 flocked to Bohemia, where the Taborites had instaurated a kind of peasant collectivism? Contrary to the opinion that sees in the word *Pikarti* a translation of *bagardi,* Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini gave it the meaning "Picard, originally from Belgian Gaul."[416] The Free-Spirit doctrine that they propagated suggests a close relationship with the *Homines Intelligentiae,* whose community in Brussels had been purged by the Inquisition.

In the manner of the Anabaptists tramping towards Munster a century later, the Pikarti converged on Bohemia, where the Hussite insurrection sent out glimmers of freedom and gave glimpses of the opportunity for an existence in accordance with the teachings of Willem van Hildernissem and Gilles of Canter.

The Picardian doctrine especially took hold in the regions that were badly controlled by the Taborites, such as Zatec, Plzen and Prague. It showed through under a watered-down form in the closed field of theological quarrels surrounding Sigmund of Repan and especially Martin Huska, called "Loquis," who preached a kind of Dolcinism, which evoked the end of time and the reign of the saints. In the fashion of the times, Huska announced "if the Christians must always suffer thus, I would not want to be a servant of God."

In February 1421, the chronicler Laurent of Brczova denounced the progression of the Free-Spirit among the Taborites: "Because of this heresy, alas! The brothers living in Tabor have split into two factions, one Picard[ian], the other Taborite. The most faithful party, the Taborites, expelled more than 200 men and women who were infected by the Picardian heresy."[417]

In the Eighteenth Century, Beausobre would attribute to the Pikarti the name Adamites, due to the Edenic innocence that they claimed for themselves. According to Laurent: "Traveling through forests and over hills, several of them fell into such madness that men and women disencumbered themselves of their clothes and went around nude, saying that clothing had been adopted because of the sins committed by the first parents, but they were in a state of innocence. Through a similar madness, they imagined that there was no sin if one of the brothers had commerce with one of the sisters. And, if the woman gave birth, she would say that she had conceived through the Holy Spirit. (Baptism was not practiced because) children of parents living in holiness (that is to say, the members of the community) were conceived without the original, mortal sin (…). They prayed to God whom they possessed inside them by saying: Our Father who is inside us …"[418]

Aloof from Picardian radicalization, Martin Huska remained loyal to the apostolic tradition and was inspired by more moderate demands so as to instaurate a religious modernism in matters of the eucharist.

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[415] R. Vaneigem, *Le Mouvement du libre-espirit, op. cit.,* p. 180 and *sq.* [*Translator's note*: see Raoul Vaneigem, The Movement of the Free Spirit (New York, Zone Books, 1994), p. 192–195.]

[416] L. de Brezcova, *De Gestis,* Prague, 1893, p. 431.

[417] *Ibid.*

[418] R. Vaneigem, *Le Mouvement du libre-espirit, op. cit.,* p. 186 and *sq.* [*Translator's note*: see R. Vaneigem, The Movement of the Free Spirit, pp. 193–194.]

The autonomy of the Picardian community would last two months, from December 1420 to January 1421. Its spokesperson, Peter Kanis, seconded by men and women of the people such as Rohan the Blacksmith, Nicolas also known as Moses, Adam, and Mary preached in the taverns and celebrated the free weddings of love that the clergy and the Taborites called fornication or sexual licence.

Soon enough, the persecutions of the Pikarti began. Nicolas of Pehlrimov published a treatise against Kanis as a prelude to the attack that, around mid-April, military chief Jan Zizka launched against those expelled from Tabor. Fifty prisoners, including Peter Kanis, were burned at Klokoty.

The survivors then organized their resistance under the leadership of Rohan the Blacksmith. On 20 April, after violent fighting, Zizka crushed the Pikarti and sent 25 prisoners to the pyre. Others were executed in Prague.

On 21 October 1421, the partisans of Kanis who had taken refuge in a forest outside of Bernatice succumbed and were exterminated, except for one person who was spared so that he could report upon the Picardian doctrine. A small number of Adamites occupied the fortress of Ostrov for a while before winning the south by conducting subsistance raids against the villages, which gave them a reputation for brigandage.

The terror by which Zizka's Taborites exonerated themselves from their own difficulties made an expiatory victim of Martin Huska. Although Huska was no longer in solidarity with the Pikarti and had abjured, Zizka vowed that he would be burned in Prague, along with his friend Procope the Blind. Frightened by the troubles in the capital, where Martin enjoyed great sympathy, the magistrates preferred to send their executioner to Roudnica. Martin and Procope were put to death in a refinement of tortures that the Inquisition used to punish the Taborite heretics, inspired by the same God, it is true.

Chapter 38: The Victory of the Reformers and the Birth of the Protestant Churches

That which is called the Reformation and saw the emergence of schismatic churches around Martin Luther and John Calvin did not add any fundamental novelty to the programme of the reformers who, from the Eleventh Century on, fought against the temporal interests of Rome's clergy. Commonly accepted among historians, the idea of Catholicism's control over the people of Europe was contradicted from the moment that one distanced oneself from the power of the laws imposed by the princes and the ecclesiastical authority, with its grid of parishes, confessors, priests, inquisitors and preachers who propagated guilt, horror of sexuality, the Satanism of women, the omnipresent image of death and a Hell directly inspired by the services of penal justice.

The fear, hatred and scorn of the Constantinian Church never ceased to animate the most diverse classes of society. Indifference and irreligion reigned in the disinherited milieu, where the cynicism of false piety served the beggars and soliciters. Only the aspiration to a pre-Constantinian Christianity — ascetic, altruistic, loyal to voluntary poverty, inclined towards martyrdom, anti-clerical and theocratic — brought a religious coloration to the collectivist nostalgias from the Fourth to the Sixteenth Centuries. Each time that Christianity manifested itself, the Catholic Church persecuted it (with the exception of a brief period in the Sixteenth Century).

Attentive to the temporal prerogatives that, through enrichment, conferred upon it a considerable power, the Catholic Church was more and more distanced from the *Ekklesia,* the spiritual communities of the faithful, which summoned to their vows Vaudois, adepts of voluntary poverty, Wycliffe's Lollards, Hussites, Taborites and a crowd of agitators whose project to abolish tithes guaranteed success.

In the Church itself, voices were raised to clamor for new accords between the interests of God and the financial interests of a "multinational" that was insisted upon by the Zealot Simon, metamorphosed into Saint Peter.

"Our fat canons believe themselves freed from God if they sing in a clear voice, in the choir, a hallelujah or a response; then they allow themselves to return to their homes to entertain themselves and have supper with their ham actors and their jugglers."[419] This diatribe was not written by Savonarola, nor by Luther, but by Antoine of Padua (1195–1231), an orthodox spirit but aware of the split between the faith of the poor and the Church of the rich that, through its carelessness, discouraged the resignation of the disinherited, who were completely prohibited from "living according to the Christ."

Neither Wycliffe, Huss, Savonarola, Luther nor Calvin pursued aims that were revolutionary, schismatic or hostile to Catholicism. Their designs placed them in the political line of Gregoire IX, taking the side of Ramihrdus against the high clergy.

The development of the economic process gave Luther and Calvin a weapon that was finally capable of breaking the spiritual monopoly that the cynicism of the pontifical bureaucracy had discredited

[419] *L'Italie mystique,* p. 156.

by the scandal of the market in indulgences and the priority given to business. The expansion of commerce, the growing independence of the banks and preindustrial artisanal enterprises instaurated a spiritual state that was favorable to the new reforms. The separation from Rome did not simply signify the end of an odious hierarchy, intermixing faith and financial interests; it implied the ideas that belief properly belonged to the individual in his or her relationship with God and that the management of capital constituted a domain separate from religion, governed by the imperatives of Christian morality. The rigorous obedience to God of a Calvinist man of business accorded with the intransigent search for profit, because — banishing the crazy expenditures of hedonism — it underwrote an ascetic morality in conformity with the Christian institution. As Max Weber has shown, Protestantism discovered in the austerity of accumulation and the reproduction of capital a puritanism that inspired the "free" relationship of the sinner with the tutelary God, keeping watch over the rate of profit. Where Rome looted [*pille*] and squandered [*gaspille*], the reformers economized and invested.

The concern with moralizing the morals of the clergy intervened too late to dam up the pious ethics of the reformers. The Council of Trente would run aground in its attempt to restore the authority of Catholicism in the northern regions, the cradle of the industrial revolution and the first bourgeois, parliamentary and democratic regimes.

Two Agitators At The Dawn Of The Reformation: Hans Boehm And Jerome Savonarola

"He was," Norman Cohn writes, "a shephard and, in his spare time, a popular entertainer, drumming and piping in hostelries and in the market-place — whence the nickname, by which he is still known, of Drummer (or Piper) of Niklashausen."[420]

In an ordinary irony of history, Hans [Boehm] heard about the Italian Franciscan John of Capistrano, not as a pitiless inquisitor, author of the massacre of the Fraticelles of Maiolati, but as a brother extolling repentance and the rejection of luxury in Germany 30 years previously. As John of Capistrano had incited the bonfire of the vanities in which the people set aside their beautiful clothes, their games of dice and cards, their objects of pure enjoyment, on a day of Lent, the shepherd would burn his drum in front of the parish-church of Niklashausen and preach.

Mary appreared to him and intimated to him the order to propagate the Good Word [*parole*], with the result that Niklashausen would raise itself to the glory of the terrestrial Jerusalem. There had been in the church a statue of the Virgin, to which were attributed miraculous powers. The priest of the parish would not give his support to a project that erected Niklashausen as the place elected by divine providence instead of Rome.

The fact was that the little shepherd suddenly revealed himself to be endowed with an extraordinary eloquence. From the fascination that he exerted upon the crowds and diverse classes of society, he soon inferred that God had endowed him with thaumaturgic powers. He preached the simplicity of morals, making himself strong enough to save any soul from hell. The pyres of the vanities would be succeded by violent attacks on the corrupt clergy and the powerful.

He would soon incite the refusal to pay taxes and tithes. And that the priests should abandon their outrageous privileges and content themselves with whatever the people agreed to give them.

The Archbishop of Mayence, who had until then been cantonized in a prudent reserve, plotted to put an end to an agitation that had won over a growing number of regions in Germany.

[420] *Translator's note*: Norman Cohn, *In Pursuit of the Millennium* (New York, 1961), p. 241.

"In the end Boehm emerged as a social revolutionary," Norman Cohn recounts, "proclaiming the imminence of the egalitarian Millennium based on the Law of Nature."

> In the coming Kingdom the use of wood, water and pasturage, the right to fish and hunt would be freely enjoyed by all, as they had been in olden times. Tributes of all kinds would be abolished for ever. No rent or services would be owed to any lord, no taxes or duties to any prince. Distinctions of rank and status would cease to exist and nobody would have authority over anybody else. All would live together as brothers, everyone enjoying the same liberties and doing the same amount of work as everyone else. 'Princes, ecclesiastical and secular alike, and counts and knights should only possess as much as common folk, then everyone will have enough. The time will have to come when princes and lords will work for their daily bread.' And Boehm extended his attack beyond the local lords and princes to the very summit of society: 'The Emperor is a scoundrel and the Pope is useless. It is the Emperor who gives the princes and counts and knights the right to levy taxes on the common people. Alas, poor devils that you are!'
>
> No doubt Boehm's teaching appealed in different ways to different sections of the population. The demand for the overthrow of all rulers, great and small, probably appealed particularly to the urban proletariat; we know that the townsfolk did in fact come to Niklashausen, not only from Wurzburg but from all over southern and central Germany. On the other hand in demanding that wood, water, pastorage, fishing and hunting should be free to all men, Boehm was voicing a very general aspiration of the peasants. The German peasants believed that these rights had in fact been theirs in olden time, until usurped by the nobility; this was one of the wrongs which they were always expecting the future 'Emperor Frederick' to undo. But above all it was the prestige of the preacher himself, as a miraculous being sent by God, which drew the tens of thousands into the Tauber valley. The common people, peasants and artisans alike, saw in him a supernatural protector and leader, such as the 'Emperor Frederick' was to have been: a savior who could bestow on them individually the fulness of Divine Grace and who would lead them individually into an earthly Paradise.
>
> News of the wonderful happenings at Niklashausen passed rapidly from village to village in the neighborhood and was carried further afield, too, by messengers who went out in all directions. Soon vast hordes of common folk of all ages and both sexes, and including whole families, were streaming towards Niklashausen. Not only the surrounding country but all parts of southern and central Germany were in commotion, from the Alps to the Rhineland and to Thuringia. Artisans deserted their workshops and peasants their fields, shepherds and shepherdesses abandoned their flocks and hastened — often still in the same clothes and carrying their picks and hammers and scythes — to hear and adore him who was now known as 'the Holy Youth.' These people greeted one another only as 'Brother' or 'Sister' and these greetings acquired the significance of a rallying-cry. Amongst the multitudes of simple, wildly excited folk there circulated fantastic rumors. What the *plebs pauperum* had believed of Jerusalem these believed of Niklashausen. There Paradise had literally descended upon the earth; and infinite riches were lying ready to be gathered by the faithful, who would share them out amongst themselves in brotherly love.

> Meanwhile the hordes — like the *Pastoureaux* and the Flagellants before them — advanced in long columns, bearing banners and singing songs of their own composition.[421]

Hans Boehm's preaching began around 1474. Towards the end of March 1476, the pilgrimages led to retaliatory measures on the part of the large towns. The municipal council of Nuremburg prohibited the inhabitants from going to Niklashausen. Wurzburg closed its doors and armed its militias. On 12 July, the Prince-Bishop sent an infantry section of horesmen to the holy city. Arrested, Hans was incarcerated in Wurzburg, while a peasant, invested in his turn with a prophetic role, incited the people to march upon the episcopal city, where the walls would fall like those of Jericho. Forty millenarian liberators were killed. Judged hastily, Hans Boehm would have to mount the pyre where he died, one says, singing hymns. The offerings deposited by the pilgrims in the church of Niklashausen were confiscated. The Archbishop of Mayence, the Bishop of Wurzburg and the Count upon whom the New Jerusalem depended did not disdain from sharing them equitably amongst themselves. The cinders of the prophet, dispersed so that no cult could render homage to him, were not allowed to put into the air of the time the germs of a millenarianist and reforming renewal that would break the reins of all-powerful Rome.

Jerome Savonarola

For Savonarola, Joachimite prophetism, voluntary poverty, the asceticism of the Spirituals and the political calculations of the communalist tribunes composed a conjunction of diverse ambitions that would elevate him to power and plot his downfall.

Born in Ferrara in 1452, he distinguished himself in the order of the Dominicans by his eloquence and his culture. The Prior of the Monastery of Saint-Marc in Florence, he soon exercised on the brilliant court of Larent de Medici a fascination that exacerbated the attraction of purity, so frequent in the wavering of guilty pleasures.

Jean Pic de la Mirandole, whose philosophical theses were condemned by the Church, discerned an ally in the monk-prophet who, through his diatribes against the *luxuria* and *aviditas* of the Pope and the clergy, gave his voice to the popular anger, accumulated over the centuries, about the despotism of Rome.

Savonarola's millenarianism was seductive in the times in which dreams of fortune and ordinary poverty suggested an imminent apocalypse. He shared with Dolcino the mistake of giving a too precise turn to his prophecies. He announced terrible misfortunes for Italy. One didn't fail to believe him, because misfortunes occurred every day. Even death unburdened itself in the lines of the poems in which Laurent celebrated youth and beauty.

Against the vices and tyranny of the papacy, Charles VIII, the King of France, brandished the "scourge of God, the vengeful sword," the new Charlemagne, the new Frederick, the new king of a Third Age. Marcil Ficin, well versed in Kabbalah, friend of literature and pleasure, scented around the monk [Savonarola] the acrid odor of a rigor as pernicious as the Sadian hedonism of the prelates and aristocrats.

After the death of Laurent de Medici, who, enjoying a dissipated life, had invested Fra Girolamo with a secret hope of redemption, Pierre de Medici would show greater reserve, nay, frank hostility to the one who was ambitious enough to rule the lives of the Florentines.

[421] N. Cohn, *Les Fanatiques de l'Apocalypse,* pp. 247–254. [*Translator's note*: Norman Cohn, *In Pursuit of the Millennium,* p. 243–245. Rather than translate Cohn back into English, we have quoted directly from the original.]

Savonarola's appeals to voluntary poverty, which revived memories of the Fraticelles and the Spirituals, rallied to him the suffrage of the disinherited classes. He would soon thereafter tip over into the puritanical mysticism of all the extremisms.

The flight of Pierre, the proclamation of the Florentine Republic in 1494 and the triumphal entry of King Charles VIII into the city all bestowed upon Savonarola the power of a spiritual and temporal leader.

Florence, promoted as the New Jerusalem, finally marked the beginning of the Third Age, the prelude to the return of the Christ to earth and the massive conversion of the Turks and the Jews.

The hysteria inherent in the compulsion for virtue would kindle in the town, renamed for the refinement of its arts, purifying flames that one called "pyres of the vanities." One threw on them pell-mell jewels, ornaments, books, paintings, and luxurious frocks.

Sandro Botticelli, the most sensual of the painters, would succumb to this destructive madness, to this rage in which life took revenge on the scorn that overwhelmed it by annihilating with a sinister joy all that made life pleasant. Into this rage was mixed the legitimate resentment of the exploited, on whose back lived luxury, from which the exploited were excluded. Savonarola's sermons, which both flattered the demands that he could not satisfy and the hatred to which he gave evangelical virtue (thereby alienating him little by little from the aristocracy and the intellectuals), contained promises of a new order that, politically, would remain a dead letter.

The party of Rome regrouped its partisans. Pope Alexander VI, who was intelligent, brutal and corrupt, excommunicated the monk and prohibited him from preaching. Savonarola would ignore him. Arrested in his convent at Saint-Marc, then tortured, charged with heresy, which his doctrine basically did not merit, he was — despite the effervescence of his partisans, the *Piagnomi,* from Piagnonia, which was the name of the bell at the convent of Saint-Marc — hanged and burned with two of his disciples, Domenico of Pescia and Sylvestri Maruff, on 23 May 1498.

The programme for the renewal of the Church, which Savonarola had folded within the risky politics of the city, would be expounded by Luther as the protest of all Christianity against the ignominy of Catholicism, the religion soiled by the unworthiness of its priests. Savonarola had the prudence to remain in Germany, where the old tradition of the emperors and princes hostile to Rome would make the old principle *cuius regio, eius religio*[422] work in favor of Lutherism.

From Heresy To The Religion Of The State: Luther And Calvin

The Reformation of the Church trimphed with Luther and Calvin, but it triumphed outside of the Church and against it. What victories could those who dreamed of a renewal of faith and the freedom of belief hope to see from the new state religion?

Born in 1483, a student, then the holder of a Master's Degree from the University of Erfurt in 1505, [Martin] Luther was ordained a priest in 1507. He attained the position of professor and preacher at the University of Wittenberg due to the sympathies that he aroused in the Prince-Elector of Saxony.

A visit to Rome in 1511 revealed to him the state of cupidity and license that reigned among the prelates and the pontifical court. Assuredly, he was not the only one, nor the first one to be jealous of the feasts and luxury of the Church, to be indignant with a vehemence.

The promotional sale of indulgences, begun by Pope Leon X to finance the works of the Church of Saint-Peter, offered Luther an occasion to excite the discontent of the northern towns and the

[422] *Translator's note*: Latin for "religion follows the faith of the prince."

regions heated by the agitation of Boehm and the Taborites, but also the German princes, who were traditionally hostile to Rome and soon thereafter (around 1520) put off by the authoritarianism of the Catholic Emperor Charles V.

To collect funds from the sale of indulgences, the archbishop of Mayence, having deputized the Dominican Tetzel, a talented preacher who would absolve all sins if the price was paid, said "one could fornicate with the Virgin Mary herself."

From his arrival in Wittenberg, a violent polemic opposed Tetzel to Luther, who had the double advantage of being there with him and being able to express with the crudeness of popular language opinions that were widely held. With the glibness of a traveling businessman, Tetzel proposed to settle the debate with an ordeal of fire and water: "I mock your brayings," Luther would retort. "In place of water, I advise the juice of the grape arbor and, in place of fire, the aroma of a roasted goose." The rough treatment that the people gave to Tetzel's emulators alarmed those in Rome responsible for the marketing[423] operation founded on the redemption of sin, while the monk of Wittenberg — emboldened by his popularity — summarized in 95 articles his theses against the Roman clique. On 31 October 1517, he attached them to the walls of the Church of All Saints. In vain did Cardinal Cajetan, the apostolic nuncio and the ecclesiastical hierarchy try to get him to sign a retraction.

In 1520, the Papal Bull *Exsurge* condemned 41 of Luther's propositions and ordered that the lampoons be burned. Accompanied by his disciples, Luther brought himself to the door of Wittenberg, where a pyre had been lighted, and with great solemnity both the Papal Bull as well as the writings of Luther's adversaries were thrown into it.

From Germany to England, in France and the Netherlands, the pyre of Wittenberg — which had symbolically consumed the power of Rome — would set public opinion aflame. For the princes and kings, Catholicism was merely an instrument of political domination. None of them had any scruples about dumping it if it encumbered more than it served. In 1527, the very loyal servant of faith named Emperor Charles V subjected Rome to the most pitiless sacking and massacres that it had known since the days of the Visigoths. Francois I, King of France, no less a good Catholic, burned the Protestants but helped the German reformers in their struggle against Charles V; he hated the Emperor so much that he did not hesitate to ally himself with Islam.

While the economy had condemned Dolcino, the Spirituals and Savonarola, it saved Luther and his movement; the economy carried them to power by virtue of the force that, underneath the outward appearance of religion and ideology, began to appear in broad daylight as the veritable mode of government of mankind: the economy.

Luther and Calvin ratified the obscure decrees on free enterprise, even in the crushing of peasant communalism and the condemnation of the Free-Spirit so resolutely irreconciable with the economic control exercised over the lives of men and women.

In 1521, Charles V summoned Luther to appear before the diet of the princes meeting in Worms, in the Rhineland. Strong from the sympathy that his act of rebellion aroused among the lords who were not anxious to grovel under the boot of the Emperor, Luther presented his profession of faith like a challenge, then, foreseeing arrest, took refuge in Saxony, where the Elector — under the pretext of imprisoning him — protected him at his chateau in Wartburg. There he translated the Bible into German and laid the bases for a new dogma.

In 1521, Thomas Muntzer, taking the freedoms claimed by Luther literally, joined the peasants in revolt and revived the hopes for a Joachimite Third Age. In 1525, Luther, in his lampoon entitled

[423] *Translator's note*: English in original.

Against the Bands of Looting Peasants and Assassins, appealed for the most pitiless repression, thereby removing the last reticences of the German princes concerning his doctrine and thus counter-signing the birth of Lutherism as the religion of the State. In five years, the heresiarch (in his own way) repeated the Constantinian operation of the Roman Church. He set himself up as the *pontifex maximus* by according to the national and religious independence of the principalities and kingdoms of the north the support of a bourgeoisie of free enterprise that saw in enrichment the compensation for sacrifice and obedience to a reasonable God.

John Calvin

The heresiarchal career of John Calvin ended with a *coup d'Etat,* the success of which he himself assured. He was born in 1509 in Noyon, in Picardy, where his father, who was the attorney of the chapter, reserved him for a career in the church. After studying at the College of Montaigu in Paris, Orleans and Bourges, he published a commentary on Seneca's *De clementia.*

Around 1533, he adopted the ideas of the Reformation. Suspected of having drafted a harangue against his friend, the Rector of the University of Paris, Nicolas Cop (who was deeply impregnated by the Lutherian doctrine), he fled to Angouleme, then took refuge in Nerac with the help of Marguerite of Navarre, sister of Francois I and protector of the reforms.

In 1534, Calvin was in Basle, where he drafted the first version of *The Christian Institution.* In 1536, William Farel, who attempted to implant the Reformation in Geneva, invited him to use his authority to convince the citizens, who were not in a hurry to exchange a new religious truth for an old one about which they only cared a little. Banishment sanctioned them both in 1538 and Calvin went to Strasbourg, where Martin Bucer had consolidated one of the bastions of Lutherism. Returning to Geneva in 1541, Calvin thenceforth worked to instaurate his power. An opposition among the inhabitants of the city rose against him, founded just as much on the awareness of belonging to a free state as on the repugnance that Calvinist austerity aroused among the people who were naturally inclined to the joys of existence. Calvin would work patiently at breaking the party of political freedom — stigmatized under the name "libertines" — that was led by Jacob Gruet and the Pocques, Perceval and Quintin Thierry faction, vituperated under the name "spiritual libertines."

In 1547, after an unjust trial, Jacob Gruet was decapitated for having defended the free choice of atheism and being an insurgent against the dictatorship of a Puritanism that forged in the north of Europe the Anglo-Saxon mindset that illustrated English Victorianism and Americanism in the most deplorable senses of the words.

To confirm the truth that God had imposed, all one would need to do would be to drag to the pyre the physician Michel Servet, who took refuge in Geneva in 1553 to escape from Inquisitorial barbarity.

Chapter 39: The Dissidents from Lutheranism and Calvinism

In 1523, Luther published the treatise *Jesus-Christ was born Jewish,* which accused the papacy of having distanced the Jews from the truth faith. The Church had confined them to usury; it had calumnied them, accused them of "using the blood of Christians to remove their bad ordor," and "I do not know what [other] nonsense." "If we would like to help them," the Reformer wrote, "it is the law of Christian love that we must apply to them, not the law of the Popes."[424]

What became of such beautiful provisions, after the "Constantinian" turn of the religion called reformed, and the appeal to a holy war against the peasants? In 1543, two pamphelts were published back to back by the master of Wittenberg: *Against the Jews and their Lies* and *Shem, Hamephoras.*

Jean Delumeau judged it useful to yield some extracts from writings that Hitler would print in millions of copies:

> The Christ, the Reformer [Martin Luther] writes, did not have "enemies more venomous, more determined, more bitter than the Jews." He "who lets himself steal, sin and curse for them has only to (…) grovel on his knees, to adore this sanctuary (…) then to glory himself for having been merciful (…): Christ will compensate him on the day of the Last Judgment with the eternal fire of Hell." When Judas was hanged, "the Jews sent their servants with platters of money and pitchers of gold to collect his piss along with the other treasures, and then they ate and drank this shit, and had thus acquired eyes so penetrating that they perceived in the Scriptures glosses that were not found by either Matthew or Isaiah" … "When God and the angels hear a Jew fart, there are such bursts of laughter and gamboling!"
>
> "Observe all that the Jews have suffered for fifteen hundred years and there will be much worse in Hell (…). They must tell us why (…) they are a people who are rejected by God, are without a king, without prophets, without a temple; they can't give any other reason than their sins…" "Never has the anger of God manifested itself with more brilliance than on these people."
>
> "To make this blaphemous doctrine disappear, it will be necessary to set fire to all their synagogues and, if something remains after the fire, to cover it with sand and mud so that one can no longer see the smallest tile or rock from their temple… One must prohibit Jews from being among us and on our soil, and from praising God, praying, teaching or singing, upon pain of death."[425]

[424] J. Delumeau, *op. cit.,* p. 371. [*Translator's note*: The German title of Luther's pamphet was *Das Jesus Christus ein geborener Jude sei.* For his *Von den Juden und ihren Luegen,* see W. Linden (ed.), *Luther's Kampfschriften gegen das Judentum,* (Berlin, 1936).]

[425] *Ibid.,* pp. 372 and 373.

In that same year, 1523, when Luther extolled a certain tolerance for the Jews, he also propagated the notion of the heresy of prudent reservation, which no doubt intimated to him his own destiny:

> "If you want to extirpate the heresy," Luther wrote in 1523, "above all you must know how to remove it from the heart and to provide men with a way to divert themselves through a profound movement of the will. By force you will not exhaust it, but you will instead reinforce it… Because if by force one burns all the Jews and the heretics, one will not convince nor convert a single one through these means."[426]
>
> But (Jean Delumeau notes) after the violence of Th. Munzter and the war of the peasants, and while the princes and towns adhered in great numbers to the Reformation, here Luther changed his tone, by virtue of another logic, contrary to the first one: Protestantism is the return to Scripture, the removal of the "novelties" — the Roman "superstitions" as well as the "sacramentalism" of Zwingli. Inversely, "the wickedness of the world" manifests itself as both "idolatry and heresy." The State can not tolerate these Satanic aberrations. The Reformer thus judged necessary the intervention of civil authority so as to bring an end to "abominations" such as Mass. Under threats, the Chapter of the Collegiate Church of Wittenberg ceased celebrating Mass on Christmas 1524. Two years later, Luther wrote to John, the new Elector of Saxony: "There must only be a single kind of preaching in each place." In 1527, he demanded that the Elector organize "ecclesiastical visits" to his territory. Thenceforth, in the Lutherian countries, the State would control the organization of the Church, would break religious deviances, and had to look after the preaching of the Gospels. The "German mystical spiritualists," disappointed with Luther, had good sport reproaching him, as well as the other reformers of the people, with having substituted "a new papacy," a "papacy of paper" (the Bible) for the Roman papacy. For Schwenckfeld, Luther "led us out from Egypt and through the desert, across the Red Sea, but he left us there, wandering aimlessly, everything striving to persuade us that we were already in the Promised Land." A little later, Weigel would reproach the "Pope of Wittenberg" with having organized a new slavery and persecuting the inspired.[427]

Like the Popes that he vilified, Luther indeed did not disdain from adopting the ordinary hypocrisy that, to serve powerful interests, one must choke off with the left hand the morality caressed with the right. When Philippe of Hess demanded the authorization to marry a second spouse in a just wedding, the spiritual master, after having equivocated, accepted on the condition that the affair remain secret. The recognized Landgrave sent a cask of Rhineland wine as the price for the indulgence. At least Pope Jules II paid Michel-Ange with money extorted from the Catholics.

Calvin knew nothing of such weaknesses. He hated detested with a visceral hatred and his faith never tolerated the least lapse. Several months after having assassinated Michael Servetus, while Sebastian Castellion (*) set himself against such barbarity, Calvin published a *Declaration to Maintain the True Faith,* in which he declared:

> Our merciful [one], who takes great pleasure in letting the heresies go unpunished (…) would like — out of fear that the Church of God is not defamed by too much rigor — that one makes a fashion of all the errors… Therefore God does not want that we spare either

[426] *Ibid.,* p. 518.
[427] *Ibid.,* p. 519.

> the towns or the people, indeed, to the point of razing the walls and exterminating the memory of the inhabitants and intimidating everyone as a sign of a much greater hatred, for fear that the infection might spread further.[428]

(*) In the *Treatise of the Heretics,* Castellion wrote: "We see that there is hardly any sect — today there are so many of them — that does not see the others as heretical: with the result that, if in one city or region you are esteemed to be truly loyal, in the next one you are esteemed to be heretical."[429]

And Theodore of Beze raised the stakes:

> Tyranny is a lesser evil than having licence such that each one makes his own fantasy and it is better to have a tyrant, nay, even a cruel one than not having a prince, or having one under whom it is permitted for each person to do what he wants to do… Those who do not want the magistrate to mix himself up in religious affairs, and principally to punish heretics, scorn what the Word [*Parole*] of God expresses … and bring ruin and extreme destruction to the Church.[430]
>
> The Prince "must erect and maintain good edicts against those who by simple stubborness want to resist the establishment of the true religion, as we see our time in being practiced with respect to the papacy, the Anabaptists and other heretics in England, Denmark, Sweden, Scotland, a good part of Germany and Switzerland."[431]

Johannes Denck

While the shadow of Lutheranism and Calvinism threatened to spread over the world an obscurantism that had the fallacious advantages over Rome of reason and freedom, Johannes Denck was — along with Sebastian Castellion — one of the rare, lucid and sincere men for whom human feeling had the upper hand over beliefs and ideologies that were so quick to suffocate under their sublime abstractions.

Denck was a member of no party other than his own; he did not aspire to govern others. To emancipate himself from all constraints appeared to him a sufficient task. Lutherian freedom did not accommodate itself to such license — indeed, it was hardly reconciable with any church, it is true.

Born in 1500 in Habach, in Upper Bavaria, Denck entered the University of Ingolstadt at the age of 17. While pursuing his studies at Basle, he worked as a proofreader at a print shop and perfected his Latin, Greek and Hebrew. He read Erasmus and was passionate about medieval mysticism and adhered to the ideas of Thomas Muntzer. On the insistance of the Lutherian Oecolampade, he was named Rector of the Saint-Sebald school at Nuremberg when he was 23 years old. He got married and frequented the milieu that, without anarchronism, can be called libertarian.

Like other great preindustrial towns, Nuremberg oscillated in the undertow of the Reformation between Lutherian tyranny, disappointment with imperfect freedoms and the old Catholic current in which the restless and disenchanted ebbed. Indifference to the [whole] religious thing, which had dominated the absolute reign of Catholicism according to the imperative ritual observances, changed into cold and willful scepticism.

[428] Calvin, *Declaration pour maintenir la vraie foi,* in *Opera omnia.*
[429] Castellion, *Traite des heretiques,* p. 12.
[430] Th. De Beze, quoted by Delumaeu, *op. cit.,* p. 520.
[431] *Ibid.,* p. 521.

A number of strong spirits, including the clergy, no doubt shared the atheism of Thomas Scoto or Hermann of Rijswijck but were not emboldened enough to claim it, that is, beyond the people who possessed the means of their insolence — such as Frederick II or the *condottiere* Montefeltro, whose cask carried the inscription that promised a beautiful future: "Neither God nor master." The contestation of the existence of God now resulted in the multiplication of dogmatic truths and parties of the "true faith."

The affair of the "three Godless painters"[432] offered to the municipality the occasion to rage against the party of the sceptics. The banter that was opposed to the religions too often found complacent ears among the people. It sharpened the language of the intellectuals and the artists. The three painters put into question (the brothers Behaim) enjoyed the friendship of Johannes Denck, whose independence of spirit had more than once irritated the Lutherian notables, Osiander in particular.

The council would summon him to appear and demanded a confession of faith from him that would wash away all suspicion. Denck complied and expounded upon his doubts with a provocative sincerity in two successive texts.

Examining the belief in which he had been educated, he apparently adopted the position that it was a matter of a purely fictive faith, "because it had not triumphed over my spiritual poverty, my inclination to sin, my weakness and my sick situation (...). I will not undertake to pretend that I now possess the faith that translates itself into life, although I see clearly that my disbelief can no longer continue before God." And he added: "All believers are, at one moment or another, unbelievers. To become believers, they must let their passions and the terrestrial man die, in such a fashion that it is no longer they who live, such as they might in their nonbelief, but God who lives in them through the mediation of the Christ."[433]

God's presence acting in man freed him from all constraints and all sin: such would be the doctrine of those Calvin would call the "Spiritual Libertines."

On 25 January 1525, Denck was condemned to banishment. Forced to leave his family and stripped of his university position, he took refuge in June 1525 among the Anabaptists of Saint-Gall, who were themselves victims of the hatred of the Lutherians; he would soon shock them with his conceptions of individual freedom. Wandering led him to Augsburg, where he stayed up to October 1526, drafting *Wer die Wahre warlich lieb hat,*[434] a balance sheet of paradoxes, contradictions and absurdities in the Bible, which brought him to this conclusion: the quarrels about interpretation had no shared meaning, only the presence of God (when the Spirit deigned to reveal it), which signified and served as a guide to existence through the spontaneity of the impulses that it engendered.

Hostility from the Lutherians forced Denck into exile again. The same fate awaited him in Strasbourg, where Bucer and Capito denounced him for subversive activities.

He was already worn out by his solitary combat when he arrived in Basle in September 1527. Oecolampade was disposed to accord him asylum on the condition that he adjured. Denck wrote a kind of confession, mixing a few concessions (dictated by weakness) with opinions close to those of Schwenckfeld and his notion of the inward man. Oecolampade would enter into the tradition of the inquisitorial lie by publishing it under the title (deceptive at the very least) *The Abjuration of Hans Denck.*

[432] Kolde, *Zum Process des Johann Deuck,* 1890.

[433] J. Danck, in *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de geographie ecclesiastique,* Paris, 1930.

[434] *Translator's note*: "He Who Has the True Love."

When Denck died from plague in Basle at the age of 27, he was about to publish *Von der Wahren Liebe.*[435] In it he insisted on the following theme: he who loves God and has God in his heart need not bother with institutions, which only blind him.

In 1528, two of his texts, which appeared as the preface and the appendix to the *Deutsche Theologie,* made it clear "that the creature is necessary to God and that the man deified by illumination enjoys the union with Him as well as with the Christ," which was an idea that the philosopher Jacob Boehme — another victim of the New [Protestant] Churches — would develop in the Seventeenth Century.

The Nineteenth Century would see in Denck one of the pioneers of free thought. No doubt he influenced the lucid and tormented conscience of Kierkegaard. Nevertheless, it seems that the combined hatred of the Protestants and the Catholics was caused by the impregnation of the Free-Spirit, which was discernible in this thesis: "Where there is faith, there is no sin; where there is no sin, there resides divine virtue."[436]

Sebastian Franck

A philosopher and historian, Sebastian Franck belonged to the very small number of humanists who allied an unfailing passion for tolerance and respect for life with intelligence.

Born in Donauworth, in Souable, in 1499, he enrolled at the University of Heidelberg, where he associated with Martin Bucer, the future master of Strasbourg. Despite his contacts with Luther after 1519, he began his ecclesiastical career in the Catholic Church, which he left around 1525. An evangelistic preacher in the region of Nuremburg, he married Ottilie Behaim, sister of the painters Barthold and Sebald, disciples of Durer and [various] free spirits to whom all forms of religion were repugnant.

Nevertheless, he also took a position against the justification through faith defended by Johannes Denck, friend of the Behaims, and adopted a position that was in conformity with Christian principles. But in 1529 he resigned his ecclesiastical functions, moved to Strasbourg, associated with Michael Servetus and Caspar Schwenckfeld, and increasingly adopted Denck's attitude, in which convictions only had meaning in the coherence between ideas and a life stripped of artifice and hypocrisy. Such was the spirit that animated his masterpiece, *Chronica, Zeytbuch and Geschictbibel* (*Chronicles, Annals and History of the Bible*), published in 1531. Erasmus took offense at a citation and denounced him to the Council of Strasbourg; with the support of Bucer, he got Franck expelled. Exposed to the hatred of Erasmus and the Lutherians, and condemned by Melanchton, he ended up as a printer in Ulm, the Council of which rejected several demands for his expulsion, including one attempted by Philippe of Hess, Luther's protector. Franck took the time to publish several personal works and a treatise by Cornelius Agrippa, before being banished in 1530. Taking refuge in Basle, where he entered into a second marriage with the heiress from a family of great publishers, he did not cease publishing — his collection of proverbs enjoyed a great popularity — and fighting for tolerance and the suppression of the death penalty. ("If the choice was given to me, I would much rather be in the condition of many whom the world has condemned as heretical than in that of those whom it has canonized."[437]) He died in 1542, scarcely 43 years old.

Hostile to all forms of ecclesiastical organization, he rejected the authority of the priests as well as that of the Scriptures. The Gospels, he said, had replaced pontifical authority with a *papieren Papst* (a

[435] *Translator's note*: "Protected by Love."

[436] J. Danck, in *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de geographie ecclesiastique,* Paris, 1930.

[437] S. Franck, *Chroniques, annales et histoire de la Bible.*

paper Pope). This was the cause of all evil; he denounced it in a society dominated by the strength and power of the Prince. No war was just because all wars derived from the principle of appropriation. On the other hand, his pessimism hardly accorded any credit to revolt. Closer to the Tao than to La Boetie, he contented himself with identifying God with a feeling of interior plenitude, in which he dreamed that brutality and the misery of a changeless world were annihilated.

In the insurmountable and vain confrontation in which truths fought each other bitterly, tolerance represented the only human virtue. ("Thus take from each sect what is good and leave the rest to the Devil."[438]). This sufficed to bring down upon him the animosity of the majority of the humanists, ideologues and sectarians of his time, from the Catholics to the Anabaptists. On the other hand, Sebastian Castellion did everything he could to distribute his works, to which Valentin Weigel, Jacob Boehme, Dirk Coornherdt and the historian Gottfried Arnold paid homage.

Carlstadt And Schwenckfeld

The rivalry of power that quickly opposed Luther to Andreas Rudolf Bodenstein, also known as Carlstadt, determined a rivalry of opinion that was even more subject to uncertainty than the dogma of the reforms that were incomfortably cemented to the controversies. The Constantinian Catholic Church had hardly preceded otherwise, but its absolutism treated doubts with the sword. The similar operation attempted by Luther, Calvin and Henry VIII of England no longer inscribed itself in the same historical conditions. Underneath the predominance of the agrarian mode of production, the mole of merchantile expansion was at work. The progress of values open to modernity no longer guaranteed the stability of the divine order and the unchanging power of its ministers.

The defeat of the Roman Church, the power of which was only imperfectly restored by the counter-offensive of the Council of Trente, thus prohibited the despotic pretensions of the popes of the Reformation to go beyond local tyrannies that poorly resisted contestation.

Unlike Denck, Munzter, Storch, Hoffmann and Schwenckfeld, Carlstadt did not have a doctrine properly speaking. He contented himself with scorning Luther, knocking around that conceited wimp whose shadow extended over Europe.

Born around 1480, Carlstadt studied philosophy and theology in Erfurt (1499), then in Cologne (1500). There he was, professor of theology, exegete of the Bible and honest doctor at the University of Sienna. Interested in Luther's demands, he soon clashed with the man's intransigence, for which the dogmatic interpretation of sacred texts had the upper hand over the generosity of the heart's impulses. Was it not precisely the most sensitive part, nay, the most sensual part of man, that most ardently fought against the Roman clergy?

Carlstadt's meeting with Thomas Muntzer, whose revolutionary millenarianism both fascinated and frightened him, hastened the break with Luther, who chased him from Wittenberg. Taking refuge in Orlamuende, where he came out against the necessity of baptism and communion, he was expelled on the insistence of his old friend, who pursued him in hatred, especially where he had the support of the princes. Carlstadt would only find peace in the company of Zwingli, who founded a rival Church in Zurich and did not follow Luther. Carlstadt would defend his positions, which were close to those of Denck, who estimated that the sincerity of faith dispensed with all spiritual authority. He was teaching at the University of Zurich when he died from plague in 1541.

[438] *Ibid.*

Freedom was the cause of the break between Luther and Caspar Schwenckfeld (1490–1561), whose sect experienced equal persecution under the Catholics and the Lutherians. In the line of Denck, he rejected the sacraments and religious rites in favor of faith, in which humanity founded its feeling of conformity with the designs of God. He put the accent on the inward man, whose mystical experiences participated in illumination. Certain Pietists would later claim his teachings.

Michael Servetus

A physician and humanist, born around 1509 in Villaneuva, Spain, Michael Servetus owed his dramatic end less to an audacity of thought — more well-known than it would appear, if not less imprudent — than to a settling of accounts to which the morbid authority of John Calvin humbled itself. His medical studies at the University of Toulouse and the University of Paris induced in him, as in Rabelais, a certain scepticism in theological matters. The man who discovered the mechanisms of the circulation of blood in the lungs would experience some difficulty in finding clarity in the Trinity that was a part of the Constantinian arsenal and had presided over the instauration of Catholicism as the religion of the State.

Anti-trinitarianism, popularized by Socin and his friends, responded less to a theological preoccupation than to the questioning of the Church through the derision of a principle that had never succeeded in getting itself out of trouble and the mystical character of which in fact dissimulated the political necessity of holding firm between God (the Father) and humankind (the Son) the balance of the Spirit that governed the temporal in the name of a celestial mandate.

Published in 1531, Servetus' *De trinitatis erroribus* justified Arius and the old Gnosticism by denying the existence of the Spirit — and thus the Church — as distinct beings. According to Servetus, everything took place between the Logos, which was eternal, and the Son, who was not.

In 1553, the anonymous publication of Servetus' *Christianismi restitutio* drew down upon him threats from the Inquisition. Arrested in Lyon and imprisoned, he had the good fortune to escape and the misfortune of going to Geneva, that is, near-by Calvin, with whom he had exchanged letters more than once. The *Restitutio* was an ironic take on Calvin's *Institutio* and it put Calvin on his guard inasmuch as Servetus adopted positions that were close to those of Anabaptism. But his freedom of morals and language especially worked upon Calvin like an insult to his majesty as a prophet. An unjust trial, to which no one gave credit (because the complaints offered no common measure with the accusations that had been made against Jacob Gruet), succeeded where the Inquisition had failed and would benefit Rome. Servetus was burned alive on 27 October 1553.[439]

Sebastian Castellion

By the force of things, the Reformation inscribed itself in a movement of desacralization inherent in the merchantile expansion that, up to the Twentieth Century, reduced the religions of the indistrialized nations to supermarket junk. With its multiple sects, Protestantism marked the transition from clerical theology — supported by a huge apparatus of popes and monarchs of divine right — to the ideologies founded on a restrictive ethics that oscillated between totalitarianisms of the nationalist or collectivist type and the demand for freedom that in fact authorized the becoming of the economy.

[439] R. Bainton, *Hunted Heretics,* 1953; G.H. Williams, *Radical Reformation,* 1962.

The importance of morality in the Reformed religion prolonged the will of the reformers who, starting in the Eleventh Century and especially in the whirlpool of urban freedoms, intended to moralize the Church. Even if ethical despotism was most often succeded by the tyranny of dogmatic prescriptions, the absence of a sacred orthodoxy — of a rectilinear perspective in which God was the point of flight and arrival — no longer authorized one to speak of heresies from the moment that Protestantism occupied the predominant position in a given country or region.

If Calvin treated Servetus as a heretic, this was because he estimated himself to be — as much as the Pope did — the elect of God, fixing in Geneva the New Jerusalem that did not stop fluctuating geographically. On the other hand, his role as puritan dictator took the upper hand during the polemic between him and Sebastian Castellion. The controversy was no longer theological: it was ideological. It put into question the inhumanity of the repressive discourse attributed to God.

The official history makes a lot of Erasmus, the humanist and anti-Semite, intellectual and misogynist, defender of freedom and partisan of the death penalty for heretics, whom he occasionally denounced. He knew nothing of Guillaume Postel, who discerned in the emancipation of women the foundation of a human society, nor Castellion, who fought for tolerance.

Born in 1515 in Saint-Martin-du-Fresne in the Bugey, where the influence of the Vaudois continued to exist, Sebastian Castellion studied in Lyon and associated with the humanists who were seduced by the new ideas. The spectacle of the persecutions and his reading of Calvin's *The Christian Institution* won him over to the Reformation. He left for Strasbourg, then Geneva, where Calvin offered him a professor's position in 1542. His *Sacred Dialogues* reflected his first hesitancies concerning Calvin's growing authoritarianism. In it he celebrated tolerance and remarked that "There is no one who more obstinately resists the truth than the great ones of this world." He soon left Geneva, having attracted the animosity of the man whom he had the naivete to admonish for his sectarianism.

Reader of Greek at the University of Basle, he provided his first manifestation of a free conscience in the preface to his translation of the Bible into Latin. Indignant over the execution of Servetus in 1553, which inspired him to write *De haereticis an sit persequendi?* (Basle, 1654), he developed a doctrine that was opposed to predestination, which Calvin used to justify his own crimes.

Published in 1562, Castellion's *Advice to Distressed France* called for universal tolerance and refused to "force consciences." It opposed the fanaticisms and horrors of the wars undertaken for the greatest glory of God. Rarely has a book been welcomed by such unanimous reprobation. Lutherians, Calvinists, Catholics and humanists all judged the project to abolish the death penalty for the crime of heresy to be criminal. His nephew and brother-in-law, guilty of having introduced the book into Geneva, had to take flight. Until his death on 29 September 1563, Castellion did not cease diffusing throughout all of Europe letters that extolled freedom of thought and were sent to all those whom he estimated capable of sharing his ideas and spreading the effects.[440]

[440] H. Buisson, *Sebastian Castellion,* Paris, 1892.

Chapter 40: The *Alumbrados* of Spain

Quite discreet until then, the Inquisition was unleashed in Spain in 1492 and took up — under the mantle of threatened faith — a gigantic genocidal operation, principally directed against the Jews, whose systematic despoilation kept the coffers of the State from going bankrupt. The power that bestowed upon the Inquisition insignias of services rendered in the art of balancing the deficits of the kingdom, in which the Jews (in a certain way) financed the conquest of the American markets, brought down upon Spain the functionaries of the religious police, with whom Northern Europe had cancelled its contracts and whom the Italy of the Renaissance valued more beyond its borders than within them.

Italian Catholicism accommodated itself to pleasures sooner or later seized by redemption, remorse and contrition. Better than the Council of Trente, the hedonism of a country inclined to luxury and the passions erected a natural barrier against the incursions of Reformation Puritanism, of which the pre-Calvinist austerity of Savonarola had presented the enticing programme.

Still cramped within the old agrarian structures in which the taste for life and liberty was only marked out through the insurrections of the *comuneros,* several peasant revolts and the emerging richness of the great towns, Spain kept the heritage of the ascetic masochism of Priscillian and Dominique Guzman, the leader of an order of divine killers, the furor of which Loyola would soon revive by giving it a less brutal but more police-like turn.

In Spain the Inquisition would durably prevent — with a zeal that was the envy of the German inquisitors — the implantation of a Protestantism that it would not succeed in containing in Flanders, despite the frightening catacombs.

Nevertheless, the Inquisition would remain abashed at the time it discovered the existence of groups of people, apparently quite numerous, who had devoted themselves to the freedoms of love according to the routes of the ecstasy that, through strange references to the old Gnosticism and the Hebdomade, popular language situated in the seventh heaven.

Bataillon dates from 1512 the appearance of the qualifier *alumbrado,* applied to a Franciscan who was "*illuminated* by the darkess of Satan."[441]

In Toledo, where the influence of heterodox Sufis of Islam was secretly perpetuated, the Inquisition hesitated to pursue Isabel de La Cruz, who had a reputation for holiness and around whom formed a group whose teachings recalled those of Marguerite Porete. One would have to wait until 23 September 1525 for the great inquisitor Manrique to promulgate an edict against the *Alumbrados,* no doubt under the cover of a campaign against the Protestants, with whom they could only be confused by some malignity of the Holy-Office. Arrested in 1529, Isabel de La Cruz was condemned to life imprisonment. One of her disciples, the priest Juan Lopez, would mount the pyre in Grenada one year later.

The chronicler Alfonso de Santa Cruz transcribed several articles from the accusatory notification for the trial at Toledo:

[441] M. Bataillon, *Erasme et l'Espagne,* Paris, 1937, p. 73. [*Translator's note*: *Alumbrados* can be translated by "Illuminati."]

> They say that the love of God in man is God. (… They) affirm that ecstasy or illumination leads to such perfection that men can no longer sin, neither mortally nor venally; that illumination frees and releases one from all authority; and that they need not render accounts to anyone, not even God, because they have put their trust in him (from whence comes their refusal of sacraments, prayers, and good works).
>
> They call the Host a bit of pate; the cross a stick; and genuflection idolatry. They believe the annihilation of their own will to be a supreme glory (…). They deny Hell (…).
>
> Far from weeping over the Passion of the Christ, they rejoice and enjoy all the pleasures during Holy Week. They affirm that the Father was incarnated as the Son and believe they speak with this God neither more nor less than with the Corregidor of Escalona. So as to remember Our Lady, they contemplate the visage of a woman instead of contemplating an image. They call the conjugal act union with God. The sect is centered around Isabel de La Cruz and a certain Father Alcazar.[442]

At the same time, a group of *Alumbrados* developed around the *beata* [blessed one] Francisca Hernandez, who was originally from Canillas, near by Salamanque. Around 1519, her court consisted of young clergymen: Bernardino Tovar, the Franciscan Gil Lopez and the bachelor Antonio of Medrano, whose amorous relations with Francisca were denounced to the Inquisition, which condemned the lovers to live separately.

Relocated to Valladolid, Francisca first lived with Bernardino Tovar and then the financier Pedro Cazalla. In the tradition of the *Homines Intelligentiae,* she founded an occult center named Paradise, in which the refinements of love conferred Edenic innocence at the end of an initiation that intermixed chastity, libertinage and exclusive passion.

At the time of the trial, Antonio of Medrano declared that, since he had known Francisca, God had given him the grace to no longer experience carnal desires, with the result that he could sleep with a woman in the same bed without prejudicing his soul. On the other hand, Francisco Ortiz affirmed: "After having relations with her for around 20 days, I acquired more wisdom in Valladolid than I did studying in Paris for 20 years. Because it is not Paris, but Paradise, that can teach me such wisdom."[443]

Francisca Hernandez seemed to have attained such a decree of holiness that continence was no longer necessary for her. The richest part of her teachings no doubt consisted in disencumbering her disciples and lovers from the feeling of guilt, which — along with the fear of coming [*jouir*] — formed a vicious circle in which love was poisoned. The theologian Melchior Cano would express the skillfully irreligious enterprise of Francisca in a formula of an astonishing modernity: "Remove fear and give assurance."

It was precisely on anguish and fear, the foundations of all religion, that the Inquisition would play to annihilate *Alumbradism.* Arrested in 1529, Francisca Hernandez and her follower, Maria Ramirez, denounced — under the threat of torture and the *quemadero*[444] — Bernardino Tovar, her brother and fourteen other people. And, according to the will of the inquisitorial tribunal, they denounced them not as *Alumbrados* but as Lutherians, which does not lack piquancy, given the hatred of Luther and Calvin for the adepts of the Free-Spirit.

In many regions of Spain, the *Alumbrados* represented such a force that the Church did not dare to attack them directly and preferred to assimilate them with the Reformers, the condemnation of

[442] M. Menendes Pelayo, *Historia de los heterodoxas espagnoles,* Mardrid, 1929, p. 526.
[443] *Ibid.,* p. 530.
[444] *Translator's note*: the Quemadero De Tablada was a place for executions, built in Seville in 1481.

whom aroused fewer reservations. They were so numerous in Seville that the Inquisition would not intervene. "The major part of the town is infected," reported a letter of the times. "There is no Duchess or Marquise, no woman of high or low condition, whom one cannot reproach for some error of this heresy."[445]

In the second half of the Sixteenth Century, a group of *Alumbrados* pushed imprudence as far as publicly contesting the Church's teachings. In 1578, a Dominican, Alonso de La Fuente — who in Llerena in Estremadure blamed the *Alumbrados* in person — was interrupted by a woman who said: "Padre, the life they lead is better than yours, and their doctrine is better, too." Her audacity, supported (in all probability) as a favorable opinion that was communally accepted in the region, would arouse the immediate reaction of the Inquisition. Arrested and subjected to torture, she confessed the names of her companions.

Their doctrine was expounded by eight members of the secular clergy. Fernando Alvarez and Father Chamizo recommended that the novices meditate on the wounds of the crucified Christ with such ardor that their faces become red, that they sweat, feel sorrow in their hearts, become nauseated, so as to culminate in an ecstasy in which, according to their expression, they "become liquified in the love of God." [Marguerite] Porete had spoken of the "annihilated soul" that announced the identification with God that Simon of Samaria called *megale dynamis,* while the Beghard John of Brunn evoked the identity of the *pneuma* and the *sperma* in the fusion that would leave him *totaliter liquefactus.*

Rendered impeccable by organic illumination, they acceded to the state of perfection and, permanently plunged into inward exaltation, they were founded in following their desires and rejecting the Church, its authority and its rites.

Beyond Alvarez and Chamizo, who was reproached for having initiated into celestial pleasure 34 people, the community at Llerena included Juan Garcia, a clergyman from Almendralejo and the bachelor Rodrigo Vasquez, a parish-priest in La Morea, who affirmed: "If the Turks govern and win Spain, it will be because each of them lives as he wants." The community also included Doctor Cristobal Mejia, a clergyman from Cazalla; a Franciscan from Valladolid, who was 63 years old; Pedro of Santa Maria; a parish-priest from Zafra, Francisca de Mesa, who, speaking of the Passion of the Christ, said: "What good is it to be preoccupied every day with the death of this man?"[446]

In Zafra, where the adepts united around the widow Lari Gomez, a shoemaker, Juan Bernal, nourished the intention to present to the court a memoire in favor of the *Alumbrados.*

The group had existed for four years when the Bishop of Salamanque, Francisco de Soto, was charged by the inquest of 1578. When he died in Llerena, on 21 June of that same year, rumor accused the *Alumbrados* of having poisoned him. The majority would perish on the pyre.

Such was the context in which the mystical exaltation of John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila took place. At first suspected of *Alumbradism,* both of them — hastening to furnish proofs of their perfect submission to the Church — channeled the carnal ecstasies that haloed them with a divine grace towards a morbid asceticism.

[445] R. Vaneigem, *op. cit.,* p. 193. [*Translator's note*: see R. Vaneigem, *The Movement of the Free Spirit* (New York: 1994), p. 199.]

[446] *Ibid.,* p. 194. [*Translator's note*: see R. Vaneigem, *The Movement of the Free Spirit,* p. 200.]

Chapter 41: The Spiritual Libertines

At the same time that the Spanish Inquisition worried itself with people who, unconcerned with Catholicism, Protestantism, the Church and its reforms, lived in the quest for love and discovered in it the very meaning of their existence, Luther and Calvin attempted to subdue — in the countries slowly conquered by their glacial truths — the natural liberties that authorized among the people the spiritual liberties that were being arrogated by the Reformers.

Eloi Pruystinck And The Loyists

Thanks to economic development, around 1520 Antwerp saw the new wave of individual initiative push towards the shore the audacities of private enterprise, the reconversion of God into divine capital and, at the same time, a propensity for luxury and the feeling of power that raised the man of business to the dignity of the elect, nay, the Demiurge.

At the beginning of the Sixteenth Century, when God — carved up by two factions that disputed their exclusivity — finally left an opening for the human, a slate-roofer by the name of Eloi Pruystinck, an *illiteratus et mecchanicus* proletarian, agitated the working-class neighborhood of Saint-Andrew.

A letter from David Joris allows one to understand that an encounter put the two men into motion on the following question: What is the best life according to the God of goodness and freedom, whom the Reformation extolled, at least in the mind of Eloi?

In February 1525, Pruystinck went to Wittenberg with the intention of persuading with the justness of his convictions the man towards whom Europe had come to turn its eyes: [Martin] Luther, entangled in his sudden glory. Pruystinck confronted Philippe Melanchton in the presence of the master who, scandalized by the libertarian opinions of Eloi, sent a veritable letter of denunciation to the Reformers of Antwerp:

> I have learned how much your country is agitated by spirits who are full of errors, who devote themselves to hindering the progress of the Christian truth; I know that there has come among you a demon incarnate who wants to induce and divert you from the true intelligence of the Gospel, so as to make you fall into darkness. To avoid his traps more easily, I would like to provide you with some of his propositions: 'Each man,' according to him, 'has the Holy-Spirit; the Holy-Spirit is nothing other than our reason. — Each man has faith; nature has taught me to do to my neighbor what I would like done to me; it is to have faith to act this way. — Each one will have eternal life; there is neither Hell nor damnation; only the flesh will be damned. — The law is not violated by bad desires as long as my will does not give in to them. — Those who do not have the Holy-Spirit do not sin any longer, because they do not possess reason.' There is no one who does not want to be more knowledgeable than Luther; everyone wants to win his spurs at my expense. Your demon, when he was here with me, denied all of Luther's articles, although what they were was demonstrated to him and although he himself was betrayed

> by defending several of them. To tell you the truth, he is an inconstant and lying spirit, full of audacity and insolence, which allows him to affirm something and then deny it at the same time. He never dares to maintain what he has affirmed, and he only came here to praise himself for having discussed a few things with us. With energy he supported the idea that God's commandments are good and that God does not want sin to exist, which I willingly conceded to him; but he obstinately refused to agree that God, in not wanting sin to exist, nevertheless permits its reign over mankind. I do not doubt that he represented me to you as if I said that sin is required by God.[447]

Returning to Antwerp, Eloi did not cease to continue to propagate his conception of a life inspired by a good God who was hostile to violence, punishment and guilt, and whose grace rendered Edenic innocence to those who followed their desires and their propensity for happiness. Eloi seems to have associated with the humanist Johannes Campanus, (*) a man full of sweetness, whose project — expounded under the title *On the Possibility of a Union of the Christians and the Turks* (1546) — would in part inspire Pruystinck's ideas.

(*) In 1530, Melanchton would refuse any contact with Campanus and would demand that he be arrested. After the Servetus affair, Campanus would be imprisoned for twenty years.

In February 1526, Eloi and nine of his friends were arrested for committing the crimes of heresy and reading forbidden books. The penal moderation that the Regent Marguerite of Austria encouraged in the Netherlands explains the clemency of the judgment. Condemned to apologize and to wear a pectoral sign that designated him a heretic, Eloi — loyal to his refusal of martyrdom — simulated such a perfect devotion that the magistrates dispensed with the opprobrious marking.

A group formed around Eloi that was more and more important, and whose propaganda — distributed in Holland and Germany — was created by Dominique of Uccle, "writer of their killer books." Van Meteren revealed among their many adepts the presence of several bourgeois from Antwerp, "the best, the richest and the most well-considered, who agreed to live together joyously and in an Epicurean manner." And the chronicler deplored "their impious opinions, which were supportive of the world and the flesh, and which derided and treated as stupidities both the Catholic religion and the Reformed one."[448]

Like the *Homines Intelligentiae* in Brussels a century earlier, the Loyists lost all prudence to the extent that those who were indifferent to the war conducted in the name of the Pope of Rome or the "Pope" of Wittenberg were increasing in number. In 1533, the Lutherian Carnovianus, passing through Antwerp, spoke with indignation about the "Illuminati" in Antwerp in a letter he sent to Johannes Hess: "Those men are far more perverse and obstinate than the Anabaptists."[449]

The winds of repression became more violent when, in 1531, Marguerite of Austria ceded the Regency of the Netherlands to her niece, Mary of Hungary, sister of Charles V, who was resolved to pursue the heretics, "repentant or not, with a sufficient severity that their error is a death blow and without any other consideration than that of not entirely depopulating the provinces."

No doubt the frenzied persecution of the Anabaptists diverted the Inquisitorial eye (in which the light of the pyres shined) to the Loyists. Nourishing as little sympathy for the adepts of Melchior Hoffmann as for the other henchman of the God of justice, the Loyists did not take part in the raids of the Munsterites who plotted to seize Antwerp's City Hall on 11 May 1535. The frightful massacre

[447] M. Luther, *Werke, Weimar,* 1883–1908, vol. XVIII, French translation in Jundt, *op. cit.,* pp. 122–123.
[448] Van Meteren, *Historia der Nederlanden,* Amsterdam, 1623.
[449] *Ibid.*

that ensued thus spared them, while the siege of the town by the Duke of Gueldre, acting for the King of France and against Charles V, gave them a fresh postponement.

The fatal blow would come from Deventer, where Juriann Ketel, a friend of David Joris, was tortured and denounced Corneille Van Lier, a lord from Berchem (a village near Antwerp), his two brothers-in-law, the French jeweler Christopher Herault, a companion of Eloi, and a certain "slate-roofer." When informed, the Governess Mary of Hungary demanded expeditious justice.

Other accusations, cleverly spread around, proceeded from the Calvinist milieu.

In 1544, Vallerand Poulain (from Strasbourg) wrote to Calvin: "Our brothers from Valenciennes who just now provided us with certain writings of the Quintinists have returned (…). If you would take up arms against the Quintinists, I would rejoice. (…) My brother Raymond has written to me that these horrors are now spreading in Lower Germany through the actions of certain people named David and Eloi. He still has not yet sent me the expose of their doctrine as he had promised me. When he sends it, I will transmit it to you." Everything indicates that the announced expose was none other than the *Summa doctrinae,* published by Doellinger; I have provided the French translation in *The Movement of the Free Spirit.*[450]

In July, the police arrested Eloi, Christopher Herault, John Davion, a rich bourgeois originally from Lille, Jan Dorhaut, a poor salt-seller, Dominique of Uccle, the author of the pamphlets, the painter Henry of Smet, the engraver and sculptor Cornelis van den Bossche, and others.

A large number of Loyists took flight and went to England, where some of them joined the Familists of Henry Niclaes. On 14 September 1544, Dominique of Uccle, learning of the tortures to which Eloi was subjected, profited from the absence of his guardian and hanged himself in his cell. His legend as a kind dreamer and sweet Epicurean would continue into the Nineteenth Century in his neighborhood of Saint-Andrew, where Georges Eeckhout welcomed it.[451] Herault and his companions were decapitated.

No doubt the Loyist movement survived clandestinely. The chroniclers no longer mentioned it, but in 1550 the existence of a group of men and women claiming for themselves the freedoms of love was indicated in the environs of Alost, in Flanders. In 1561, an attack on a convent of Dominicans near Bruges was attributed to this band. One then went after the blazing iconoclasts. The exploits of Jacob Gherraerts, called the Hollander, evoked the partisans of Battenburg more than the peaceful Loyists, but it does not appear from Eloi's doctrine that the partisans of the sweetness of life would let themselves be killed without defending themselves.

The Loyist influence can be discerned in the Familists, the Ranters, Dirk Coornherdt and the anti-clericalism that was strong in the city in which Richard Payne Knight assured his readers that it was, from the beginning, devoted to the fusional cults of the Magna Mater.

Jacob Gruet

It is to the honor of Geneva, corrupted by dictatorship, that there rose up against the theocratic pretensions of Calvin citizens who were inclined — according to a tradition of national[ist] liberty — to claim the free disposition of self. Several enlightened bourgeois took it upon themselves to confront the fanatic who was resolved to subject the entire population of the city to his austere compulsions.

[450]French translation in R. Vaneigem, *Le Mouvement du Libre-Espirit,* p. 210. [*Translator's note*: Raoul Vaneigem, The Movement of the Free Spirit (New York 1994), pp. 210 and 212.]

[451]G. Eekhoud, *Les libertins d'Anvers,* Paris, 1912.

The revolt, baited by taunts, would reveal an atheistic and irreligious current that the uncertain fate of the Reform party still authorized happy license.

Benoite, the wife of Senator Pierre Ameux, justifying the luxuriance of his amorous life, would declare that she only saw in it the fortunate effect of the "communion of the saints."[452]

Jacob Gruet, leader of the opposition to Calvin, composed a lampoon that evoked the theses of Thomas Scoto and Hermann of Rijswick. Though he ordered the destruction of this book, the autocrat could not prevent himself from quoting extracts in his *Opinion that Calvin will deliver at the Proceeding that one must convene against the Book by Gruet to the Senate of Geneva.*

In 1547, Gruet would try to stir up the people of Geneva. He affixed an appeal to revolt to the walls of the principal church in Geneva. Had he waited too long? Calvin obtained his arrest and the arrest of Gruet's friends. The accused were decapitated and Calvin would reign as master in his citadel, throwing (like fodder to divine anger) the enemies whom he had attracted to the better ones to be consumed, or denouncing them to the magistrates, Catholic and Reformed, so that justice could be served.

Calvin had called "libertines" the friends of political and religious liberty, which he wished to reduce. He would give the name "Spiritual Libertines" to a faction that propagated a doctrine of the free satisfaction of desire according to the tradition of the Free-Spirit among the humanists and men of the people who were seduced by the modernity of the Reformation and rebuffed by the obscurantism that stood out against it.

* * *

Jacob Gruet rejected the existence of God and denied the existence of eternal life in the beyond, "saying of the law of God that it was worth nothing, just like the people who made it; that the Gospel is only lies and that all of the Scriptures are a false and crazy doctrine."[453]

In an article on the Gruet affair, Berriot published several remarks attributed to the incriminated lampoon. He added to them a letter discovered at the time of Gruet's arrest.

> Moses is mocked in his 'person' and in his 'doctrine,' as are all the 'patriarchs and prophets,' who are characterized as '*folz, resveurs,* fanatics': as for 'their scriptures,' the author only has 'detestation'! There is no more tenderness for the 'evangelists' and 'disciples' upon whom he inflicts the epithets '*maraux,* scoundrels, apostates, oafs, *escerveles.* As far as the Virgin Mary — through whom Jesus is attacked — she is ridiculed in her 'honor' and her 'decency,' since she is described as a 'bawd' … Nevertheless, it is the Christ who is the target of the most lively insults: the manuscript denies his 'divinity,' contests 'his Passion,' and his 'resurrection'; Jesus of Nazareth, at first called 'Nicolas of Molle' by the pamphlet, is defined as 'a beggar, a liar, a *folz,* a seducer, a wicked man and a miserable, unhappy fanatic, (…) a lout full of malignant presumption' whose 'miracles (…) are only sorceries and antics' and whose hanging [from the cross] was 'merited'; in brief, the Christ, who 'believed himself to be the son of God' and who 'was a hypocrite,' is in fact 'miserably dead in his folly, a dumb *follastre,* a great drunk, a detestable traitor and a hanged wicked man'! The 'Holy Spirit,' which seems of little interest to the author, is only the object of several blasphemies, 'intolerable' or 'abominable,' it is true; while

[452] *Histoire de Geneve,* I, p. 399.
[453] A. Jundt, *op. cit.,* p. 127.

'the (…) Scriptures, the Old as well as the New Testament,' are the subject of many pages of manuscript, which express a veritable 'detestation': 'The Gospel (…) is only lies,' 'all of the Scriptures are false and wicked and (…) have less meaning than Aesop's fables' since 'it is a false and crazy doctrine' … Thus, the author clearly vows 'to mock all Christianity' and 'all the Christians who have believed in (…) Jesus Christ and believe and will believe' [in him]. He finally questions in a fundamental fashion 'this law of God that is worth nothing'; he 'blasphemies against the divine power and the essence of God' and, denying that God is 'creator of the heavens and earth,' he 'renounces and abolishes all religion and divinity,' so as to conclude: 'God is nothing,' 'men (are) similar to the beasts' and 'eternal life' doesn't exist!

Faced with such remarks, the historian of ideas certainly regrets not having access to the 13 manuscript sheets that were publicly burned in 1550, as well as the original copy of the letter *Clarissime lector,* which one found at the time of the arrest and of which Gruet denied paternity in 1547, but which he recognized as having in his possession and which he said he copied from [a text by] Jean des Cordes, which has also disappeared, in the Nineteenth Century it seems… Through a fortunate turn of events, Francois Rocca — the secretary of the Consistory, later the archivist of Geneva in 1768, and someone who knew of the Gruet affair through the *Letter* from Monnoie that concerned *The Book of the Three Impostors* — had, over the course of recounting the entirety of the trial in his *Collection of Manuscript Memoirs* in Geneva from 1526 to 1593, recopied several pieces and transcribed the precious text of the *Clarissime lector,* which still existed at that point, a text to which explicit reference was made by the interrogations of June 1547 as well as Beze's *Vita Calvini* and Letter LXXVII from Calvin to Viret… It is thus in Francois Rocca's *Manuscript Memoirs,* deposited at the Geneva Historical Society, that one can find a copy of this document that is so important to the history of the thought of the Renaissance and that obviously merits quotation at length:

> Dear illustrious reader:
>
> There are men of diverse opinions: one is a professor of literature (*litterarum professor*), another is a soldier (*bellicator*), another is in love with riches, another is a philosopher, still another is a blacksmith. What do I seem to you, illustrious reader?
>
> I do not know what men have said and written, but I believe that all that has been written with respect to divine power is false, dreamed up and fantastic… Several wise men say that man was created from the substance of the earth and that the first man was Adam…
>
> Truly, I myself think that the world is without beginning (*absque principio*) and will have no end (*necdam aliqua finis*). Indeed, who is the man who has truly described the beginning of the world? None other than Moses, who described the first generation, and this same Moses wrote about what took place two thousand years before his own epoch: therefore, all that he wrote, he had taken in his spirit, having no other authority than what he himself says and what he says was revealed to him… Me, I deny his authority because many men have contested it (…). He says that he saw God in the form of fire and that God was

presented to him in another form (… as) a voice (…). Truly, I am in agreement with Aristotle, who wrote the following after reading the works of Moses: I am astonished to see this preposterous person say a lot and prove nothing (*iste cornutus multa dicit, sed nihil probat*)!

This same Moses affirmed, as I have said, that his first narratives were revealed to him by God, which is something I do not know about (…). After him came other men who invented still more (…) and added other fables and wrote them (…) about Job, Isaiah and the other ancients. Then the moderns, such as Jerome, Ambroise, Bede, Scotus, Aquinas and other barbarians (*barbari*) invented other falsehoods (…). Still others would come later (…).

Nevertheless, what dignity did their God have? It is a horrible thing to give man life and then, after two hours and three days of it, to bring death to him (*est res nefanda facere hominem, dare illi vitam, post tandem alicui tempus vitae duarum horarum alteri trium dierum et postandem illi contribuere mortem*). It is an impossible thing to create man and then break him (…). Likewise, some say that the soul is in the body, while others say that it is a spirit: where does this spirit go when it leaves the body? If you respond to me: it remains in a certain place, waiting for the Final Advent, then why does God not leave it in its own body, rather than changing its place? If you say: they are at rest, glorifying God and others are in Hell, [then I would respond] if they are in Hell, some essence would appear, therefore nothing is known of these things with certitude! … Likewise, if it happens that some are resuscitated from among the dead, I believe that they would have described something of the form of this other world, like Lazarus and many others… But are these things invented for the pleasure of men, like those [stories of people] who sleep for a whole year?

And then, this one whom one calls the Christ, who claimed to be the Son of God: why did he so suffer the Passion? If he were the Son of God, he would have demonstrated the power that he said God had. I do not believe that he was the Son of God, but that he was a crazy person (*fantasticus*) who wanted to attribute the glory to himself and all the things that have been written on this subject are most certainly false (…).

Me, I believe that when a man is dead, there is no more hope for life (*Hoc ideo credo quod, cum mortuus est homo, nulla altera expectatio vitae*).

Finally, we who are called Christians: do we not think that the Jews, the Turks and those who live differently are condemned because they do not believe in the Christ? Therefore, if truly there is only one God, master of all things (*unus Deus actor omnium rerum*) who created mankind, why did he create such a great multitude so as to make them perish (*quare creavit ipsam periri facere*)? This is absurd: do you not see that all prosper, the Turks as well as the Christians? (…)

Nevertheless, as I said at the beginning, there is a difference in the nature of men: some are bloodthirsty, others are peaceful; some are truly chaste where women are concerned, others are lustful. From whence could this come? From

> the nature of the elements (*ex natura elementorum*)… Where the moderns support the idea that this machine (*hanc fabricam*) is entirely governed by a single God, I personally think that the astrological philosophers are closer to the truth (*puto philosophos astrologos propinquiores esse veritati* …). I truly think that nothing is not driven by the sun, the moon and the stars, along with the four elements (*sole, luna et stellis, cum quatuor elementis*). Nevertheless, if you ask me who made these things, since no one is their author (*nullus est author de iis*), I do not know how I would respond to you. But there are astronomers (…) such as Plato and Aristotle, and if you read them you will practically perceive the truth (*sunt aliqui astronomi* (…) *sicut Plato, Aristoteles quos, si leges, percipas proprius veritatem*).[454] (*)

(*) In his *Scrutelio atheismi,* Spizelius attributed to his contemporary, Theodore Simon, the following credo: "I believe in three things: the heavens, the earth and the celestial form. The earth is the nourishing mother of all things and the celestial form contains all thought and all speech [*parole*]. Thus eat, drink and partake of pleasure, because God is nothing other."[455]

Quintin Thierry And His Friends

Around 1525, while Eloi the Roofer was justifying the search for pleasure and the enjoyments of existence in Antwerp, Coppin of Lille — known through Calvin's surly allusions[456] — professed a similar teaching in his hometown. Not far from there, in Tournai, a tailor named Quintin Thierry (or Thiefry) left his trade and his city to go to France where there spread a spiritual state that was both detached from Catholic dogma and reticent with respect to Lutheranism. In any case, Quintin and a companion, Bertrand of the Mills, hardly had difficulty rallying sympathy. Antoine Pocques of Lille and Claude Perceval, no doubt originally from Rouen, seconded Quintin after the death of Bertrand of the Mills. In Paris, Quintin confronted Calvin, who later was infatuated with having him "repeat this gossip" in his lampoon. Many artisans in the capitol shared the Tournaisians' opinions.

For his part, Pocques went to Strasbourg where, using the double language of devotion, he deceived the Lutherian Bucer and obtained from him letters of recommendation for the Reformers of other countries. Nevertheless, this same Bucer had in 1538 put on her guard Queen Marguerite of Navarre, the author of the gallant tales of the *Heptameron,* who — at her court in Nerac — sheltered the innovators who were threatened by the politics of her brother, Francois I, whatever their opinions were.

Pocques pushed insolence and provocation to the point of clashing with Calvin, but he, more mistrustful than Bucer, accorded him no recommendations.

On the other hand, the court of Navarre was favorable to the discourse that gave to ordinary terrestrial pleasures, willingly practiced in this strata of society, the best of heaven's reasons. Did not one impute the redaction of [Marguerite] Porete's book *The Mirror of Simple Souls* to the "Marguerite of the daisies [*marguerites*]"?

[454] F. Berriot, *Un proces d'atheisme a Geneve, l'affaire Gruet,* BSHPF, 1979.
[455] *Ibid.*
[456] Calvin, *Contre la secte phantastique et furieuse des libertins,* Geneve, 1547.

Describing the court at Nerac, Jundt remarked: "One speaks a lot there, it is true, of inward piety, but one gaily surrenders to the pleasures of life."[457]

In 1543, Pocques and Quintin received an eager welcome at the court of Marguerite. There they developed the idea that there was no sin in devoting oneself to the ecstasies of love and that following the liberties of nature resulted precisely from the presence in each person of a God of universal goodness.

When Calvin's accusations — enclosed within his treatise *Against the Fantastic and Furious Sect of the Libertines who call themselves Spiritualists* — were made in Nerac, they only aroused scorn and reprobation. Marguerite would express quite clearly the contempt in which she held this text directed "against herself and against her servants."[458] She let the author know that she did not desire to have near her such a contemptible man.

His insistence alarmed Marguerite, whose sympathies for people persecuted by her brother placed her in a difficult situation. It suited her to avoid the thunderbolts of Geneva more than those of Rome.

Pocques and Quintin returned to the Netherlands, where Calvin's henchmen — Vallerand-Poulain and his friends — had not ceased their activities. On 13 September 1542, in Valenciennes, Hugues Lescantelier, a brewer from Maire-lez-Tournai, and Caso Hocq were decapitated for supporting a "new sect called 'libertine.'"

Lescantelier had proclaimed his state of impeccability, while Hocq — rediscovering the theses of primitive Christianity — explained that the Christ did not die on the cross, but that he had simply abandoned his human appearance, which he took on to manifest himself on earth.

In 1546, Quintin — denounced by Calvin to the Catholic authorities of Tournai, who drew their accusations from the lampoon — was arrested with many of his partisans, who were shoemakers, woodworkers and other artisans. Apprehended thanks to Calvin, Quintin would be hanged and burned because he had rallied many gentlemen from the city to his sect. Three of his friends perished by the sword.

Quintin shared with Jacob Gruet a contempt for so-called apostles. Calvin was indignant: Quintin "made sarcastic remarks about each of the apostles so as to render them contemptible. And so he called Saint Paul 'broken pot,' Saint John 'young fool,' Saint Peter a denier of God and Saint Matthew a usurer."[459]

Quintin rejected all forms of the Church, the rituals and the sacraments. God, by dying on the cross after his descent to earth, thus signified that he had abolished sin. From then on, one need only follow one's inclinations without being preoccupied with anything else. Quintin and his followers celebrated amorous passion, which offended Calvin with an intensity that said a great deal about his own conceptions about the matter: "These unfortunates profane marriage, mixing men with women like brute beasts, wherever their concupiscence leads them. (…) They color this brutal pollution with the name of spiritual marriage: they call 'spiritual movement' the furious impetuosity that pushes and enflames a man like a bull and a woman like a dog (…). They also make a similar confusion with their goods, saying that it is in accordance with the communion of the saints that no one possesses anything as his own, but that each takes what he would have."[460]

"Around 1546, their doctrine was taught in Rouen by an old Cordelier, who counted among his proselytes several ladies from noble families. He was put in prison the following year as a Reformer.

[457] A. Jundt, *Histoire du pantheisme populaire … , op. cit.,* p. 128.
[458] *Ibid.*
[459] Calvin, *Contre la secte … , op. cit.,* p. 113.
[460] *Ibid.* [*Translator's note*: Raoul Vaneigem, The Movement of the Free Spirit, p. 232.]

Calvin, to whom his writings were communicated, would refute them in an epistle addressed to the Reformed community of Rouen. Set free, the Cordelier published in response *The Shield of Defense,* to which Farel would oppose *The Sword of Speech* in 1550. In France, the last vestiges of the Spiritual Libertines met in Le Nivernais, Corbigny; in 1559 Calvin wrote to the Reformers of this town to put them on their guard against the heretics' schemes. Several rare clues still mentioned the presence of these heretics in the towns along the Rhine beyond Strasbourg. In a letter to Rodolphe Walther, one of the theologians of Zurich, Viret reported the existence of the sect in Lower Germany in 1544 and Calvin, in the same year, let it be understood that the heresy had partisans in Cologne. In 1545, the Walloon community of Wesel would declare in its confession of faith that it rejected, among other errors, those of the Libertines."[461]

[461] A. Jundt, *op. cit.,* p. 131; R. Vaneigem, *op. cit.,* p. 215 and *sq.* [*Translator's note*: Raoul Vaneigem, The Movement of the Free Spirit, pp. 224–232.]

Chapter 42: The Anabaptists

If in the Sixteenth Century no religious movement endured as much combined hostility from the Catholics, the Protestants and the temporal authorities as the Anabaptists did, this was because they added to the religious discourse of egalitarian theocracy the old social dream in which nostalgia for a golden age provided the weapons of hope to the desperate struggle against the exploiters and the destroyers of the natural riches.

In the foreboding of the Third Age, the imminence of which fit in with the crisis of the birth of modern capitalism, the proletarian demands of the towns easily mixed with the peasants' aspirations and the regrets of the old autartic rural commune.

The spectre of the millennium, which agrarian fundamentalism still gave the inhumanity inherent in the celestial mandate to the antithetical ideologies of Bolshevism and fascism, would engender among the partisans of the old order and the adepts of a new one a climate of endemic hatred and fear propitious for all the cruelty to come.

Close to the Vaudois tradition, the peaceful Anabaptists did not any less provoke persecution than those who extolled armed struggle. The Vaudois nourished such a calling for martyrdom that they practically solicited the executioner's hand. In Munster, where their equality of divine right would institute itself, the Anabaptists would show that the God of the little fathers of the people hardly spared the children judged unworthy of his goodness.

Storch, Pfeiffer And Muntzer

In the writings of its enemies, Anabaptism designated an ensemble of independent groups that were governed by prophets or apostles armed with the sword and word [*parole*] of God. Their common traits evoked the demands of the reformers of the Middle Ages. They took exception to the baptism imposed upon infants, because it was generally administered by unworthy priests and because it did not obey the individual's choice made in full knowledge of the community of the faithful. In practice, baptism played a role among the Anabaptists, and especially the Munsterians, similar to the one played by the [Communist] Party among the old Stalinists of the Twentieth Century. It was a sign of election that authorized access to the egalitarian kingdom of the saints.

The absolute authority that the Anabaptists recognized in God, whose ministers they were, freed them from obeying the spiritual and temporal authorities. In the German principalities, it expressed the nearly unanimous rejection of the prince-bishop and his allies. The collusion of the Catholic and Lutherian notables participated in the discredit of two religions that were judged to be irreconciliable with God's designs. Anabaptism especially estimated itself to be the carrier of a new order. It needed to destroy the ramparts of the old tyrannies so as to impose the authoritarian reign of the saints. Such a project would discover its social ferment in the peasant wars and the insurrections of the miners, weavers and unemployed workers.

The peasant discontent was a constant factor in history ever since the Circoncellions and Bagaudes. The peasant uprisings led by Dolcino, William Carle and John Ball rhythmned this constancy with

an energy that was exacerbated each time that the economy, through the free circulation of goods, broke the closed system of the agrarian mode of production, which was the motherly paradise that was ruined by the sordid exploitation of terrestrial nature and human nature.

From century to century — like sparks from a forge in which a humanity devoted to Hell was active — there flew manifestoes, prophecies and pamphlets such as *The Book of One Hundred Chapters,* written at the beginning of the Sixteenth Century by the "Revolutionary from the Upper Rhineland."[462]

Inspired by John Ball and the radical Taborites, this work expounded the demands for equality and justice that animated the revolt of the *Bundschuh* and that breathed life into the idea of freedom that Luther celebrated before repudiating.

Regrouping the peasants, the poor people of the villages and the wandering mercenaries, the *Bundschuh* drew its name from its emblem, which was the peasant's lace buskin. (According to Pianzola, the emblem was painted by Jorg Ratgeb.[463]) The movement was organized under the leadership of a man of the people, Joss Fritz, a forest-guard from the village of Lehen and, after an attempt upon Selestat in 1493, it imposed itself in 1502 in the region of Spire. The insurrection was crushed, but Joss Fritz managed to escape the repression and, in 1513 and 1517, organized new conflagrations in Souabe and even Alsace. His millenarianist programme did not bother with theological considerations: he appealed for the extermination of the rich and the nobles, and for the establishment of an egalitarian and fraternal society. Outside of the patrician caste and the lords, the majority of the towns were receptive and the current of sympathy aroused by the peasant wars expressed itself so strongly among the artists of the time that the majority of the official histories of art have preferred to pass over them in silence. Only Maurice Pianzola has taken the pleasure of indicating these artists in his study, *Painters and Villains.*[464]

They were named Durer, Grunewald, Jorg Ratgeb (who was a painter and military counselor to the armed peasants quartered at Pforzeim in 1526), the brothers Hans Sebald and Bartel Behaim (already condemned for irreligion at a celebrated trial at Nuremberg), Lucas Cranach, Nicolas Manuel Deutsche, Urs Graf, Philippe Dietmar (decapitated at Wurzburg in 1525), and Tilman Riemenschneider (renamed for the always equal-sized hands of his figures and whose fingers were broken by the executioners at the time of the tortures in Wurzburg in 1526).

It would fall to Muntzer and his friends to give to the movement a type of religious carapace, which was more proper to stifle than to protect it, as much as it is true that the spirit of sacrifice more predisposed the movement to martyrdom and expiatory defeat than to the victories of natural liberty.

Born in Stolberg (Thuringia) in 1488, Thomas Muntzer studied Greek, Latin and Hebrew in the course of several brilliant years at the university, which destined him for the priesthood. Soon thereafter rallied to Luther's party, he quit it no less rapidly when, having become the Pastor at Zwickau, not far from Bohemia, he met the weaver Nicolas Storch.

Influenced by the Taborite movement, Storch preached the imminence of the millenarianist revolution. The saints or elect of the New Age would be the faithful who possessed in themselves the Spirit or the Living Christ. Muntzer entered into Storch's views and gave them a more theological and sacrificial turn.

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[462] N. Cohn, *Les fanatiques de l'Apocalypse,* p. 255. [*Translator's note*: Norman Cohn, In Pursuit of the Millennium, New York, 1961, p. 250. Rather than translate Cohn back into English, we have quoted directly from the original.]

[463] M. Pianzola, *Peintres et vilains,* Paris, 1962. [*Translator's note*: in 1974, Vaneigem himself used the pseudonym "Ratgeb" to publish *De la greve sauvage a l'autogestion generalisee,* translated by Paul Sharkey in 1981 as *From Wildcat Strike to Total Self-Management.*]

[464] *Ibid.*

Stripped of his own will, the adept would expose himself — in the manner of the Christ — to ordeals and suffering, which Muntzer called "the cross." Finally allowed a kind of resurrection, he would receive the Living Christ in himself and the will of God would manifest itself through its intermediary. Here the idea of the incarnated God, common to the Free-Spirit, passed through the preliminary of the renunciation of life, along the access road to social purification without which there could be no kingdom of the saints.

Like Savonarola, Muntzer took exception to culture and erudition, condemned reading, pleasure and lust. His preaching against the Lutherian notables and the lechery of the bishops attracted the sympathies of the weavers and the miners who were reduced to poverty by inflation.

In April 1521, the municipal authorities chased him from the city. Storch unleashed an uprising that was quickly crushed. Muntzer traveled through Bohemia, was expelled from Prague, wandered in Germany and in 1523 found himself the preacher of Allstedt in Thuringia, where — with the peasants, copper-mine workers and artisans from the town — he founded a League of the Elect, which was a prefiguration of the lay League of Communists that Marx dreamed was the iron lance of the proletariat.

Invited to preach before Duke John of Saxony in July 1524, he prophetized the return of humanity to the Christ, to nature and to paradise in harmony and peace. Was not the sovereign, an open and tolerant spirit, seduced by Muntzer's eloquence and programme? He took time to reflect before summoning the prophet to Weimar for a reconciliation, at which he simply asked him to abstain from all prophetic declarations.

Nevertheless, because Heinrich Pfeiffer, an old monk, had incited a revolt of the disinherited classes against the patrician oligarchy in Muelhausen, Muntzer hastened to join him and give him the League's support. The failure of the insurrection chased Muntzer from the city and convinced him to bet upon the peasant movement; Pfeiffer, through even more audacity, succeeded in reversing the municipal majority and instaurating working-class power.

In April 1525, Muntzer hoisted a white banner painted with a rainbow, which was the symbol of the divine law that haloes the earth. Muntzer then began an apocalyptic discourse, the hysterical ardor of which augured a great deficiency in the means required for such an enterprise: "If there are but three of you who, trusting in God, seek only his name and honour, you will not fear a hundred thousand. Now go at them, and at them, and at them! The scoundrels are as dispirited as dogs…"[465]

Pfeiffer refused to leave Muelhausen. Storch, on the other hand, joined the peasant forces led by the messiah of the Third Age.

Joss Fritz conducted guerrilla operations with his skillful and rapid forces. As for Muntzer, he put the fate of his army in the hands of the same God that Luther invoked, from his side, so as to aid the princes and finish off the riffraff. In Frankenhausen, 5,000 peasants — hoping for a gesture from the Savior until the last minute — let themselves be massacred. The army of the princes and Luther lost eight mercenaries. Storch died trying to escape from the vise that the masters of heaven and earth tightened upon him. On 27 May 1525, Thomas Muntzer and Heinrich Pfeiffer were decapitated after having been tortured according to custom. The repression fell upon all of Germany. But if revolutionary Anabaptism ebbed in the countrysides, it did so only to be reborn with an increased rigor in the towns, where economic development progressed at the cost of a forced exploitation of the proletariat.

[465]N. Cohn, *op. cit.,* p. 270. [*Translator's note*: Norman Cohn, In Pursuit of the Millennium, p. 267.]

Hut, Huebmaier And Hutter

While the persecution multiplied visions of pyres, gallows and wheels [of torture], which the works of Pieter Brueghel would hold up like acts of accusation against a completely humiliated humanity, the Anabaptist movement hesitated between the anemic pacificism of the Vaudois and the violence in which God would (as usual) recognize his own.

A disciple of Muntzer, Hans Hut (also a native of Thuringia) did not hesitate to announce that in 1528 the Christ would descend upon the earth to confer the sword of his justice to the saints who were rebaptized so that they could annihilate the parish-priests, pastors, nobles and kings. The Kingdom of God would be established in the shared community of goods and the freedom of love.

Captured in 1527, Hut died in prison, no doubt due to torture, leaving others the care of leading his programme to completion: "The Christ would give them, the Anabaptists, the sword and vengeance to punish all sinners, to efface all governments, to place in common all property and kill those who would not allow themselves to be rebaptized."[466]

Hut wasn't the only one to substitute a God of resentment and great purification for the God of the dominant oppression. In 1528, the Anabaptists of Esslingen, on the Neckar [River], and Ulm fomented social revolution under the flag of what the Twentieth Century would call "extremism." (The last monotheistic religion, Islam, would rediscover in extremism a similar clash between the decline of the agrarian system and the emergence of mercantile modernity.)

Unlike the doctrines of Hut and Muntzer, those of Balthasar Huebmaier (called Pacimontanus) professed an absolute pacifism and a great spiritual opening. The pastor at Waldschut in Bavaria and a preacher at the Cathedral of Ratisbonne, he expounded the cause of Anabaptism in 1525; shortly thereafter he became uneasy and went to Zurich, from whence he was chased in 1526.

Taking refuge in Moravia, he rallied the sympathies of the inhabitants of Nikolsburg to his pacifist ideals. He gained the protection of the lords of Lichtenstein. He founded a print shop, from which came tracts that popularized the new faith. His adepts were estimated to number around 12,000 people.

Around 1527, Hans Amon, the leader of the Anabaptists in Lower Austria, provoked a schism in Huebmaier's community. Amon estimated that believers must not possess anything of their own, unlike the more moderate opinions that Menno Simonsz would later adopt according to the doctrinal line traced out by Huebmaier.

Nevertheless, Moravia soon experienced the backwash of the repressive wave that hit Germany. Since Vienna had summonded him to appear and respond to its religious options, Huebmaier — who refused to retract his remarks — was delivered to the inquisitors by his protectors, the lords of Lichtenstein. He was burned on 10 March 1528.

Hans Amon took refuge with his disciples in Slavkov, better known as Austerlitz. There in 1523 he faced the dissidence of a faction that — in the heritage of the Pikarti or Adamites — intended to live in accordance with free sex, nay, free love.

John Hutter, a native of Moso in South Tyrol, was invited to lead the community and banned those who enriched themselves. Threatened with arrest, he left Moravia for Tyrol, where he would die, executed in February 1536.

[466] *Ibid.,* p. 278. [*Translator's note*: Norman Cohn, In Pursuit of the Millennium, p. 275: "[…] Christ would return to earth and placed the two-edged sword of justice in the hands of the rebaptized Saints. The Saints would hold judgment on the priests and pastors for their false teachings and, above all, on the great ones of the earth for their persecutions; kings and nobles would be cast into chains."]

The Moravian Anabaptist community known in Slovakia under the name "Habans" — from the Hebrew words *ha banim,* "the true children of God" — would perpetuate under the name "Hutterite" the fundamental teachings of Valdeism that had been adopted by Anabaptism: the rejection of private property; the refusal to pay taxes by arguing that the State used this money to finance armed conflicts; the election of the preacher who leads the community; baptism submitted to the decision of adults; the refusal to bear arms; and the condemnation of war and the death penalty. Such would be enough to arouse the permanent animosity of the temporal and spiritual authorities.

Around the middle of the Sixteenth Century, there were nearly 70,000 adepts in Moravia. Incited by the Jesuits, the Catholic authorities would chase them from the country. The adepts' disobedient attitude during the Thirty Years' War would end up in their dispersal. They went to Translyvania, Poland, southern Russia and, starting in the Eighteenth Century, the United States.

Meanwhile, Mennonism would distance the faithful from their ambition to instaurate on earth the egalitarian kingdom of "each for God and God for all."

Melchior Hoffmann

The road taken by Melchior Hoffmann irresolutely traced itself between the aggressivity of Muntzer and Hut, and the pacifism of Huebmaier. Born around 1495 in Swabisch Hall, Hoffmann was enthusiastic about the mystical works of Tauler and the works of Luther, whom he defended at Wolmar until his expulsion from the town in 1523. At Dorpat in Estonia he preached against the use of images, inspiring an iconoclast riot in 1525, in the course of which the crowd prevented his arrest.

Hoffmann's obstinacy in predicting the end of time drew upon him the hostility of the Lutherians, one of whom (Tegetmaier) forced Hoffmann to leave Dorpat. In Stockholm, where he got married, Hoffmann fixed 1533 as the advent of the era of the saints. Exiled by Gustave Vasa, he fled to Luebeck with his wife and children, then went to Magdeburg for a while; the Lutherian Nicolas Amsdorf demanded his expulsion. Welcomed in Holstein, he was flushed out by the intrigues of Luther, whose zeal in persecuting dissidents was the envy of the inquisitors. Summoned by Duke Christian to present himself at a public confrontation in Flensburg, Hoffmann responded, not without pride, to the question of his partisans: "I do not recognize any adherents. I hold myself upright and only in the Word [*Verbe*] of God. Each one does the same."[467]

Chased from Denmark, Hoffmann took refuge in Frise, where he encountered Carlstadt, then went to Strasbourg. There in 1529 he published his *Dialogues* on the quarrels of Flensburg. He associated with Caspar Schwenckfeld and produced prophetic texts. Then Hoffmann joined the Anabaptists and intervened at the Council at Strasbourg so that a church might be assigned to them. This brought a torch to the fire of the repression. Once again he was forced into exile. In Frise, he founded an Anabaptist community, while Luther raged against those whom he (drawing upon Hoffmann's first name) called "Melchiorites." Luther's words had the virtues of a guillotine blade. In 1531, Volkertszoon and eight [other] Melchiorites wee decapitated at The Hague. Stirred by the ardor of their martyrdom, Hoffmann preached in Hess and Frise where, around 1532, Obbe Philipps became his disciple.

In the incessant glow of the violence, Hoffmann suddenly proposed — in his *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* — a peaceful conception of Anabaptism that excluded all recourse to weapons, pursuaded as he was that the redemption of humanity proceded from those who preach in the desert.

[467] *Mennonite Encyclopedia,* Scottdale, 1955–1959, article "Melchior Hoffmann."

He had scarcely appeased the notables and the [property] owners when a pamphlet in which he addressed prayers, not to the Christ nor to the Holy-Spirit but to God alone, displeased the Protestant clergy, prompted like all the priests and ministers to take offense that one might address oneself to the master of the heavens without referring to the masters of the earth. Bucer, the Pope of Strasbourg, would order his arrest.

His biographers have estimated that this was an error from the point of view of maintaining order, because his growing influence little by little counterbalanced the directives of the insurrectional wing of Anabaptism which, growing in Holland, would soon inspire a wave of urban revolts that ran aground in Amsterdam, Antwerp and Luebeck, but succeeded in Munster.

After the defeat of the Munsterites, among whom his disciple Rothman perished, the conditions of Hoffmann's detention became more serious. Only the hope of dragging a public retraction out of him — which were indeed the means that Bucer and Capito used — could save him from capital punishment. He died in 1543, never having lost his eloquence, his naivete or his faith in the imminence of the terrestrial Jerusalem.

Ironically, the majority of Hoffmann's disciples would find themselves at the center of the Munsterian powder keg. But it is true that, for close to a century, Anabaptism expressed in theological terms an endemic insurrectional situation, the violence of which most often got lost in the countries dominated by Catholicism and its religious wars. Like Hans Denck, who ironically regretted that God had not permitted him to believe in God, the Anabaptists substituted for the God of feudalism a collectivist God elected by the members of their own party. In this sense, Munster offered a beautiful example of the divine collectivism that was headed for a frightening future once God was removed from office by the State, which, self-sufficient, would no longer feel the need to invoke a celestial phantom to perpetuate the reign of fear on earth.[468]

The Munsterites

"North-west Germany at the beginning of the Sixteenth Century consisted in the main of a number of petty ecclesiastical states, each with a prince-bishop as its sovereign. Usually such a state was torn by fierce social conflicts. The government of the state was in the hands of the prince-bishop and of the chapter of the diocese, which elected him and to a large extent controlled his policy. The members of the chapter were recruited solely from the local aristocracy — a coat of arms with at least four quarterings was commonly an indispensable qualification — and they often chose one of their own number as bishop. This group of aristocratic clerics was subject to no control by any higher authority; in the regional diet they were powerfully represented and could always rely on the support of the knighthood. They therefore tended to govern solely in the interest of their own class and of the clergy of the diocese. In the ecclesiastical state, the clergy were not only very numerous — in the bisphoric of Munster there were some thirty ecclesiastical centres, including four monasteries, seven convents, ten churches, a cathedral and of course the chapter itself — but also highly privileged. Members of the chapter enjoyed rich prebends and canonries. The monks were permitted to carry on secular trades and handicrafts. Above all, the clergy as a whole were almost entirely exempt from taxation."[469]

[468] N. Cohn, *op. cit.,* p. 279. [*Translator's note*: though there is nothing on p. 275 of Cohn's In Pursuit of the Millennium that would call for such a footnote on Vaneigem's part, it is certain that he is supporting Cohn's basic thesis.]

[469] *Ibid.,* p. 280. [*Translator's note*: Norman Cohn, In Pursuit of the Millennium, p. 276.]

In 1531, Chaplain Bernt Rothmann was converted to Lutheranism at Munster. He enjoyed the support of the guilds and a rich textile manufacturer, Knipperdollinck. Seduced by the prophetic inspiration of Melchior Hoffmann, Rothmann preached the imminence of the "messianic sorrows" that announced the birth of a new era in 1533, the 15th centenary of the death of the Christ.

Upon the death of the bishop, the guilds opened the town to Reformed pastors. Hunted everywhere, the Anabaptists came there as if to the promised land.

In 1531, Sebastian Franck summarized *The Fifth Epistle attributed to Clement* thus:

> A little later, Nemrod would reign and then whomever was successful at it dominated the next one. And they began to divide the world and to quarrel about questions of property. One then distinguished Mine from Thine. Finally, the people became savage, like wild beasts. Each one wanted to be more beautiful and better than the others, in fact hoping to become their master. But God had made all things to be held in common, as today we still take advantage in common of the air, fire, the rain and the sun, and which several thievish and tyrannical men cannot appropriate and keep jealously for themselves.[470]

The *Fifth Epistle* was partial to Rothmann, whose popularity was growing among the afflux of unemployed Dutch workers, whom the rich Lutherians could not see wandering the streets of the city, penetrated with holiness, without experiencing fear.

The imprisonment of Melchior Hoffmann in Strasbourg weakened the pacifist faction and favored the efflorescence of the apostles and prophets who were more willing to brandish the torch of Munster. Among them, the butcher Jan Matthys of Haarelm and Jan Bockelson (also called John of Leyden) set themselves up as the spokesmen for a crowd for which God had prepared to set the table for a new egalitarian law.

In February 1534, a veritable hysteria for conversion seized the city; the streets were filled with ecstatics who professed their obedience to the eternal Father, to whom they delivered the city hall without striking a blow. Lutherians and Catholics took flight while Munster was proclaimed the New Jerusalem through the voices of Rothmann, Matthys and Bockelson.

The goods of the banished Lutherians and Catholics were confiscated and used to enrich communal funds. While a decree promulgated the death penalty for those who balked at letting themselves be rebaptized, the Bishop of Munster organized the siege of the town and alerted the princes and municipal counsels so that the hordes who were converging upon the egalitarian millennium could be intercepted and massacred.

After the death of Matthys, who was killed during a sortie that a divine order conjoined him to attempt, Bockelson imposed a collectivist regime and a theocratic dictatorship by virtue of which all opposition was a crime of high treason.

Each was paid by the municipal power; in the refectories, communal meals assured the needs of all under the auspices of fraternal communion. Since property depended upon sin, it was mandated that the doors of the houses be kept open. The executions of "heretics," presided over by "the King of the Final Days," went on and on in an atmosphere of terror, to which famine was soon added. Like all paradises of celestial or governmental [*etatique*] obedience, the reign of the perfect ones turned into Hell.[471]

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[470] S. Franck, *Chronica,* GA.

[471] Barret and Gurgand, *Le Roi des derniers jours,* Paris, 1981.

The millenarianist revolution imploded into horror. After the reconquest of the town by the besiegers, the great fear caused by Anabaptism would efface the dream and nightmare of the collectivists of God with a still greater ferocity. In silent agony, John of Leyden, Knipperdollinck and their friend Krechting — carved alive by burning pincers — condensed into an eternal silence the inhumanity of the oppressor and the oppression that continues to reign under the deceptive name of human history.

Pacifists And Terrorists: Menno Simonsz And Battenburg

The annihilation of Munster enraged the hardliners at the same time that the pacifism of Huebmaier and old Hoffmann restored Anabaptism to the road of sweet resignation. The odor of holiness would again be found in the very fetidity of God's carnivorous breath.

Although persecuted as much as the Munsterites, the disciples of an old priest named Menno Simonsz (1496 to around 1560), or the "Mennonites," professed a resolutely nonviolent doctrine that was stripped of collectivist demands. In 1537, the tendency inspired by Huebmaier fell under the control of Simonsz, who organized it and founded one of the many Protestant churches still in vogue today in Holland, the United States and Canada.

By contrast, the guerilla war led by John of Battenburg, born in 1495 in Gueldre, marked a stage of transition between the disaster at Munster and the unfurling of the iconoclasts in the southern Netherlands and northern France.

Abandoning his functions as the Mayor of Steenwijck in the Overijssel, John of Battenburg rallied the insurrectional wing of the Anabaptists and, in 1535 — during a tumult caused by the sect — seized Oldeklooster, a monastery in the Bolsward region.

That same year, he founded with the survivors of Munster the group called *Zwaardgeesten,* "The Spirits of the Sword." Identifying himself with Elie, and tasked with preparing the return of the Christ to earth, Battenburg called for the destruction of churches, preached polygamy and the community of goods, demanded divorce when one of the partners in a couple refused to practice confession, and exhorted his followers to exterminate with their swords anyone who didn't share his opinions.

In 1536, the Congress of Bocholt tried in vain to reconcile the Munsterites, the partisans of Battenburg and the sectarians of David Joris. The pacifists carried the day and Battenburg's appeal to armed struggle was judged to be premature.

Arrested in 1537 in Vilvorde near Brussels, Battenburg died on the pyre in 1538, leaving Zeylmaker, Appelman and Mickers at the head of the *Zwaardgeesten.* The attacks against the monasteries and churches increased; the places that were sacked were located in Alkmaar (1538), Utrecht (1541), the Overijssel, Frise, Brabant, Leyden and the surroundings of Munster, where the Battenburgist Peter Van Ork was burned in 1544. Despite the execution of Appelman in Leyden that same year, the anticlerical actions intensified in Frise (1549), Alost (1550), where a group of insurgents practiced sexual freedom, Leyden (1552) and Courtrai (1553).

The sacking of churches and the asassinations of their ministers aroused popular approval, "because the people who did not like priests were not lacking and they gladly applauded the priests' troubles and disasters"[472] and wanted to "hang the assholes [*couilles*] in the air,"[473] as Marc Van Vaernewijck reported in his *Memoirs of a Ghentian Patrician on the Religious Troubles in Flanders.*

[472] M. Van Vaernewijck, *Memoires d'un patricien gantois sur les troubles religiuex de Flandre.*
[473] *Ibid.,* p. 23.

The Iconoclasts

Even when the leaders of the Battenburg party disappeared, the Anabaptist uprisings did not any less inflame the Netherlands and northern France. But with a growing obviousness the social and political motives gained the upper hand on the [strictly] religious character. The national[ist] struggle undertaken in the Netherlands against Spanish domination created an odd front in which the most diverse interests tried to unite upon the general discontent, which lacked a shared programme. The nobles uneasily tolerated the restrictions imposed on their regional privileges by the absolutism of Philippe II; the bourgeoisie balked at paying taxes for a war that hindered its growth; even the clergy feared having its hands tied by the State power that the Inquisition wanted to have with a self-interested fervor. As far as the "malicious animal called the people," to use the words of Granvelle, the Governor of the Netherlands, it had only the recourse of toppling those responsible and the symbols of its oppression, that is to say, nearly the totality of what surrounded it.

The social violence was doubly useful for the political designs of the candidate for power: it would bring William of Orange to royalty and fostered his legend as the liberator of the northern provinces. Through the repression that it incurred, once victory was assured, it would legitimate him in the eyes of the princes, who were impatient to cage the wild beasts after letting them roar for a while.

In 1566, the discontent seemed to come from Saint-Omer. (As early as 1562, two Calvinist weavers led to the pyre in Valenciennes were liberated by rioters. In 1564, the people forced open the doors at the prisons in Bruges and Brussels.) The troubles spread to the north. On 13 August [1566], in Bailleul, the crowd destroyed the cloister, burned the crosses and the sacerdotal habits, and brought down the tabernacles. The sacking lasted eights months and spread to Armentieres, Menin, Hondschoote (which was so constant in its resolution that, later, the commissars of the Duke of Albe — charged with penal sanctions — kept far away), Tournai, where several magistrates embraced the party of the iconoclasts, a part of Artois, Brabant, Utrecht, Zelande and Amsterdam. In Antwerp, the houses of the rich were pillaged on the third day.

On 8 April 1566, taking the unfurling of iconoclasticism as their pretext, Catholics and Calvinists presented a reprimand to the Regent Marguerite of Parme and to the "bad counselors to the King" that was known as the "Compromise of the Nobles." In it, the Catholics and Calvinists matched their rejection of absolutism with their promise to restore order. They adorned themselves, as with an emblem, with the epithet "Beggar," which a minister had applied to them in an insulting manner and for which the destroyers of cathedrals vyied. On 25 August 1566, Marguerite of Parme feigned to give in. She decreed the suppression of the Inquisition, the freedom of the Reformed religion and amnesty for the nobles accused of conspiracy. The latter hastened to suppress the riots and intervened in the consistories to calm peoples' spirits. William of Orange marched on Antwerp and the Count of Egmont attempted to restore order in Flanders, where the number of rebels was estimated at 60,000 out of a total of 200,000 inhabitants.

Reassured by guarantees of freedom offered to their ministries, the Calvinist preachers condemned the iconoclastic party, whose ardor had not weakened. At first, those whom one in northern France called the "howlers" [*hurlus*] abstained from killing and carrying off ecclesiastical goods that were generally destroyed on the spot. They prided themselves on only leaving behind the rubble of some 400 churches.

Having concentrated the Spanish troops, Marguerite went on the offensive in December 1566. She annulled the decisions that dictated to her the necessity of temporizing and sent the army to Armen-

tieres, Tournai and Valenciennes, where it brought the repression begun under feudalism to a good end.

William of Orange and Brederode fled to the northern provinces, where an open guerrilla war was being fought against Spain. The expeditious justice instituted by the envoy of Philippe II, the Duke of Albe, spared neither the iconoclasts, the Catholics, the Calvinists nor the nobles who were judged to be disloyal. (The Counts of Egmont and Hornes were decapitated in 1568.)

In the southern provinces, the "Beggars" of the forests fought in Hainaut and Artois under the leadership of William of La Marck, and in Flanders under Jan Camerlynck, originally from Hondschoote, and the preachers Michiels and de Heule, the son of a rich family from Bruges. On their side, Jan Abels and the "Beggars" of the seas attacked Spanish ships with the aid of light, small boats. They benefited from the benevolence of Elizabeth of England and the aid of William of Orange, who in tried to make them submit to his authority. On 1 April 1572, the seizure of the port of La Brielle and the subsequent occupation of Flessingue marked a decisive stage in the liberation of Holland. Albe, who sank in his attempt to reconquer it, was recalled to Spain the following year. The movement of the "Beggars" fell under the blows of William of Orange and, in the south, was only able to launch political conspiracies that had no results.

The last flare-up of revolutionary Anabaptism would embrace the regions of Cleve and Wesel in Westphalia in 1567. A shoemaker named Jan Willemsen would led 300 adepts (among whom were survivors of Munster) in the nth version of the New Jerusalem, to which Adamite practices gave a bit of piquancy. Polygamy was prescribed and the Messiah Willemsen would marry 21 chosen ones. The community of goods did not implicate an economy of production; the saints lived off of raids and pillaging, attacking the homes of the priests and nobles. They lasted a dozen years before succumbing to punitive expeditions.[474]

[474]Bouterwek and N. Cohn, *Zur Literatur und Geschiscte der Wiedertaufer,* Bonn, 1884, p. 306.

Chapter 43: The Individualist Messiahs: David Joris, Nicolas Frey, Hendrik Niclaes

David Joris

Among the wandering preachers whom the Reformation and the free interpretation of the sacred texts threw upon Europe's roads, David Joris distinguished himself more through the singularity of his destiny than through the originality of his thought. Pursued by the hatred of the Catholics, Lutherians, Calvinists, Mennonites and Munsterians, this man — upon whose head there was a price wherever he went — would end his life peacefully in Basle, under the outward appearance of a notable, orthodox adept of Reformed doctrines, honorably known as John of Bruges.

Born in Bruges, perhaps in Delft, less probably in Ghent, he was surnamed David due to the role traditionally played by his father, Joris, during the sacred mysteries presented at the *Chambre de Rhetorique.* After a career as a glass engraver in Delft, he traveled as much as a merchant in the Netherlands, France and England, frequently visiting Antwerp, where he engaged in polemics with Eloi Pruystinck, founder of a group of Free-Spirit.

In 1524, he wedded Dirckgen Willems in Delft. His enthusiasm for the Reformation and his hostility for the Roman clergy brought him public torture and a banishment of three years. He then adhered to the most persecuted sect, the Anabaptists, went to Strasbourg in 1535 and manifested his opposition to the violence of the Munsterites. By virtue of an exception, his meglomania never brought him to renounce the ideals of pacificism and tolerance.

The vision of the prophetess Anneken Jans suddenly revealed to him his eschatalogical mission. He identified with the biblical David whom his father so often played on the boards of the local theater; he preached renunciation, asceticism and the advent of the millennium. The number of his partisans soon worried the temporal powers, which took repressive measures against him. Like all those elected by God, David discerned in the threats that stood out against the horizon the traditional ordeals that announced the birth of a new era. He wrote to the court of Holland, to Philippe of Hesse and to the Emperor, soliciting their support for the Davidite royalty that God had enjoined him to found.

In 1539, when Menno Simonsz denounced her as a false prophet, Anneken Jans was burned at Delft. Condemned to a proscribed life, he clandestinely visited Holland, Frise and Belgium. After the death of John of Battenburg, many terrorists joined his party, in which non-violence offered a larger place for certain Free-Spirit ideas, in particular, Adamism, that is, the necessity of recovering Edenic innocence.

Although he was hunted everywhere in Europe, David Joris devoted himself to a frenetic activity intended to get himself recognized as a messiah. He went to Oldenburg and Strasbourg, encountering there the moderate wing of the Anabaptists, whom he irritated with his obstinacy in asking for their obedience. In 1542, his most important book, *The Book of Marvels* (*'t Wonderboeck*), was published.

David denied the Bible its self-avowed privilege as unique Book. Mystical experience took priority over Scripture because only revelation illuminates the presence of God in each person. Identifying the body of man with the temple of God, David — in the first edition of his book — represented "the

last Adam or the new ecclesiastical man" and "the fiance of the Christ, the renewal of all things" in engravings that were judged to be "obscene." A note made precise the idea that the attractiveness of the young woman of the era of the saints, or Eve, symbolized "the happiness, life and voluptuousness of the spirit." Once more, the amorous conjunction discovered in spiritual androgyny the pretext for its natural legitimization. The secret life joyously led by David after his retreat from Basle would use religious discourse to remove shame and bad conscience.

Jundt quotes many extracts from the *Wonderboeck*.

> God is absolute, without beginning, a light beyond all light, a depthless abyss, the eternal origin of all that exists, an endless end. He resides in himself, unchanging and impassive, incomprehensible and silent, reposing on the foundation of his own being, like a rock or a mountain of gold. Essence without essence, he does not manifest himself in his absoluteness, he does not think about himself; nor does he express what he is; his grandeur, length, size and depth surpass all human conception; everything is annihilated on his side. And yet he is the supreme activity, he is the eternal essence and lives in all objects. It is not outside of ourselves that we must look for him, but inside us, because he is Spirit; he is the infinite light of eternal justice, widsom, truth and reason; he is the Lord of this very light, substance, life and intelligence that enlighten the intimate thoughts of the hearts of the believers and thanks to which we are able to distinguish the objects of the visible world: holy and pure essence, of perfect beauty and innocence.
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> The eternal and hidden God is obliged to manifest his unintelligible essence through his Word [*parole*] of justice, in the power of his eternal wisdom and trust; he realizes in his Word the virtuality that he has to know himself. In his Word, he lets escape outside of himself, and creates in visible form, his Sons and Daughters in conformity with his own manner of being, and destined to possess in all truth his Spirit and essence, as the eternal lights of the new heavens. God knows himself in the Word [*Verbe*], which is the image of his divine splendor, his Spirit and his substance, insofar as it is inclined towards the world of the creatures; he expresses in himself all that exists, his holy creatures equal to him, who are his Sons and Daughters. God thus begins to exist (in concrete form) in his creatures; his creation has its eternal origin in himself and pursues itself indefinitely by means of the Son, that is to say, the divine intelligence and the distinctions that this intelligence establishes in the absolute essence. Everything that emanates from God is and remains God; God remains in everything, all in all, him alone and no other. In this emanation towards us, God has received in Christ the many denominations, by means of which we try, stammering, to express his essence. This emanation does not exhaust the divine essence: similar to a fountain that flows without interruption, the Spirit of God overflows all parts and lets escape beyond him the plenitude of his being, strength, life and intelligence.
>
> When a person is elevated to the perfection of the life of the Spirit, there is no longer for him any difference between good and evil, life and death, the fall and the rising. The members of the body fulfill quite different functions and yet are equally necessary to him: it is likewise unnecessary to say that one thing is not as good as another, because all things are equally good in the eyes of God and it isn't possible to make them otherwise or better. To scorn anything would be to scorn God in his entirety [*son oeuvre*]. It is

only for us that different degrees of beauty, faith, spirituality and holiness exist: for God and in God there is neither augmentation nor diminution; he remains unchanging in his essence as he has always been. If someone — following the example of the Pharisians — wants to render his external life irreproachable so as to appear just and good in the eyes of mankind, it is only necessary to aggravate the state of corruption in which he finds himself; because he scorns the work and life of God, he damns his soul through his own justice and his own wisdom. No: to be blamed and condemned on earth is to be justified and sanctified in heaven. What one in the here-below calls lowdown and corrupt is beautiful and praiseworthy to [*aupres*] the Lord; because what pleases men displeases God; what they call good, he calls evil; what they consider to be pure and holy, he considers impure and execrable. In the same way that light follows darkness, and day is born from night, faith manifests itself through incredulity, hope through despair, love through hate and envy, goodness of the heart through guile, simplicity through duplicity, innocence through indecency, frankness through dissimulation, the spirit through the flesh, truth through the lie, and celestial essence through terrestrial essence; and so it is necessary to place oneself above the judgment of men, if they blame you or if they praise you, to act in complete freedom, and to realize with a total independence good through evil, what is imperishable through what is perishable, and to let what is luminous and pure manifest itself in its purity through what is impure.

Mankind must completely abandon itself to God's direction and do what he commands, women as well as men. God only acts from eternity in eternity; everything that exists is his work. It follows that all that is, must be, and that which does not exist, must not. God in his goodness has made everything good. Thus we live without being concerned about anything, because we are free from all evil; we reside and we live in the good. We abstain from finding anything bad, because all God's works are good. If someone does us wrong, we do not get carried away: do we get irritated with the stone against which we stub our toe? In the same way that a flute does not play itself, but is played by the breath of a person, mankind does not act by itself, but is played, speaks and manifests itself through him. Mankind is the property of God; the unique goal of its existence is to glorify its Creator; thus it must not seek its own glory in anything, but must attribute all glory to God and Christ, according to the terms of the Scriptures. Each must be content with the destiny that has been assigned to him; mankind must obey (without murmuring appeals to his Creator), must be ready to follow God anywhere he pleases and to let God make of it what he wants. Does not the potter have the right to give the clay the form that is fitting? With his iron scepter, the Eternal will break all resistance from his creatures, as easily as the potter in anger smashes the vases that he has fashioned. The man to whom these truths appear too elevated must not repell them for the simple reason that he does not understand them; he must receive them in complete submission and keep quiet on what exceeds his understanding, unless he would risk blaspheming God in his ignorance, according to the Scriptures.

The regenerated need no longer desire, seek and marry according to the flesh any [particular] woman, as if they were [mere] men, subjected to their sinful natures, but can desire, seek and marry — according to the inward Spirit — the celestial substance, whose beauty is eternal and whose glory is imperishable; they must conceive in their intelligence the

> splendor and purity of the divine essence, the unalterable satisfaction that God experiences in himself and must let the rest follow their regular course, according to the good will of God. A man must not devote himself to a woman, nor a woman to a man: the elect must devote themselves exclusively to the Lord. Not that men and women must cease to engender [children], which would be contrary to the plan and will of God: here it is a question of the marriage of the angels, the celestial wedding, long since prepared for the children of God, according to the words [*parole*] of Jeremiah, Chap. XXXI: a woman will surround a man and unite with him; she will become a man with him, flesh of his flesh, bone of his bone. This isn't a unique woman of whom the prophet speaks, but seven women united into one, the Fiance of Christ resides in seven communities. Seven women, yes, seven communities — understand me well! — must voluntarily humble themselves before one man who is Christ and they will be called his wives. Many communities give to Christ the names of Lord, Husband and King; but they are not his wives or his body: as long as they have not become his wives, he will not be their husband or their life. Christ lives for God and the community lives for Christ, that is to say, the woman lives for the man, but the man does not live for the woman. Indeed, the man is not created for the woman, but the woman is created for the man. The woman is deprived of liberty, vigor and will; she is placed under the power of the man, not under the protection and power of God. Such were Adam and Eve, of whom we carry the image in our nature: here were two souls, originally united in a single body. This unity has been broken: the man carries in himself the substance of the heavens, the woman the substance of the earth. This is why it is necessary for the woman to become man, according to the Scriptures, so that the substance foreign to the divine being can disappear. Then man will be an angel before the face of God, and man and woman together will again become equal to the Creator. Whomever will not be found in this state of celestial marriage will be cursed.[475]

Jundt concludes: "David Joris thus founded the legitimacy of polygamy or, rather, elective affinity, on the metaphysical principle of the recomposition of the integrity of human nature through the union of the sexes in a single being."[476]

Unfortunate turns of events weren't without the comfort of the idea that (according to the Lord) it suited David Joris to live an existence as bitter as that of a messiah, sect leader, apostle or outlaw. His mother was decapitated at Delft. In Deventer, his friend and publisher Juriaen Ketel died on the scaffold; his confessions led to the death of Eloi Pruystinck of Antwerp and the execution of his "libertine" friends. In his hatred, Menno Simonsz pursued Joris, denouncing his hypocrisy and the debaucheries perpetrated under the cover of perfection.

In Frise, a polemic with Johannes had [...][477] Lasco, where his authority as prophet was disparaged, motivated him to withdraw to Basle. There, under the name John of Bruges, he presented himself as a Lutherian who was persecuted by the papists. He installed himself in Basle in 1544 with his family, including his son-in-law, Simon Blesdijck, who was a Mennonite turncoat.

A respectable citizen thanks to the money that his disciples sent him, David Joris continued to send many letters of millenarianist hopes to his partisans, who lived as far away as Denmark. He justified his retreat by referring to the flight of the Christ to Egypt. No doubt Joris found good reasons by

[475] A. Jundt, *op. cit.,* p. 165.
[476] *Ibid.,* p. 166.
[477] *Translator's note*: there appear to be words missing from the text here.

which to comfort his disciples' voluntary poverty, while he himself lived in opulence thanks to his sect's funds.

Furthermore, he used his credit as a notable from Basle to openly wage combat in favor of tolerance. He defended Michel Servetus and united in friendship with Schwenckfeld and Castellion. Towards the end of his life, he quarreled with his son-in-law Blesdijck, who became an enemy due to conditional loyalty. David Joris died on 25 August 1556 and was interred with great pomp at the Saint-Leonard Church in Basle.

Approximately two and a half years later, following the familial dissensions to which Blesdijck was not a stranger, Joris' identity was brutally revealed, which provoked a slightly banal scandal in the city. Anxious, his family and friends protested their innocence. They affirmed that they knew nothing of the doctrines professed by David and that Blesdijck would condemn (the least orthodox aspects, that is) in a lampoon. He publicly adjured.

On 13 May 1559, the body and books of David were thrown on the pyre. Up to the Seventeenth Century, the Davidjorists continued to exist in Holstein, keeping up an atmosphere of polemic and calumny. David would find a defender in Gottfried Arnold, who attempted to rehabilitate him in his *Unpartelische Kirchen — und Ketzer — Historie.*[478]

Nicolas Frey

The case of Nicolas Frey offers a piquant parallel to the attitude of Henry VIII of England; and while the sword of justice overwhelmed one and served the other, the same divine will conferred the seal of its absolutism upon their very personal choices in the treatment of conjugal and private affairs.

> Nicolas Frey was originally from Windsheim in Bavaria, where he was a trader of furs. When the Reformation came to this town, he became one of the most zealous partisans of the new ideas; but a short time later he allied himself with the Anabaptists in the countryside, received a second baptism, which would be the occasion for trouble in his native town; he was imprisoned and then released when he promised to change his conduct. But as the authorities demanded that he publicly retract his errors, he preferred to flee rather than submit to this humiliation. Thus after 15 years of marriage, he left his wife Catherine, with whom he had eight children, and headed towards Nuremburg. Deceiving the hospitality that he was offered in this town by one of its most pious and respected citizens, he won over to his doctrines the sister of his host, a woman named Elizabeth, and engaged with her in what he called a spiritual and celestial marriage. Catherine, the abandoned wife, arrived a little later in Nuremburg and encouraged her husband to return with her to their native town. In response, Frey mistreated her and chased her away. Later on, he wrote about this subject to his spiritual sister or, as he called her, his conjugal sister, Elizabeth: 'I have seen in the Trinity that I must break the head of my first wife so that the prophecies of the Old and New Testaments can be accomplished. Is it not said that the seed [*semence*] of the woman will break the head of the serpent? My first wife is the serpent or demon spoken of by the Scriptures; as far as you are concerned, you are the wife whose seed must break her head. So as to become a disciple of Christ, I must hate women,

[478] G. Arnold, *Unpartelische Kirchen — und Ketzer — Historie.* [*Translator's note*: German for *An Impartial History of Churches and Heretics.*]

children, home and homeland. If I have crushed the serpent of disbelief, it is because I was forced to do so, because it isn't me who did it, but God who lives inside me and in whom I live.' Obliged to leave Nuremburg, Frey went to Strasbourg in 1532; Elizabeth joined him soon thereafter. Their imprudent schemes and badly dissimulated relations with the other sectarians of the locality soon attracted the attention of the authorities. They were imprisoned. Warned of the presence of her husband in Strasbourg, Catherine went there and beseeched him to return with her to Windsheim. Frey was inflexible. Seeing his obstinacy, the magistrate condemned him on 19 May 1534 to be drowned as a bigamist, which took place three days later at the Pont du Corbeau.

According to Capiton, he had to confess the following errors: 'The Church and the sacraments are the inventions of the Devil. — All the prophecies of the Scriptures refer to me, to my first wife and second wife. My first wife is the Queen of the Kingdom of Disbelief; she is prefigured in the person of Saul. My second wife is prefigured in David, I myself in Jonathan. In the same way that David and Jonathan formed a perpetual alliance to hunt Saul, I am allied spiritually with Elizabeth so as to hunt Catherine. — The most perfect work that a believer can accomplish is to abandon his first wife and wed a second. — The faith that justifies the Christian and the love of one's neighbor consist in the constant affection of Elizabeth; this is a work that God produced in her, so that the loyal and pious Christian is improved and comes closer to his own origin. — Elizabeth is the mother of all believers; it is through her that the true Christian faith began on earth. — In the same way that Mary engendered the Christ, Elizabeth will restore the image of the Christ to humanity and for this reason she is as worthy of singing the *Magnificat* as the Virgin. — I am the leader of the Church; the Christ accomplished in me all his previous promises; no divine promise will be accomplished after me. — I am Christ following the eternal Word [*Verbe*], the angular rock that the builders rejected. — I am sent by God to show mankind the image of Christ in my person, just as Moses had previously showed it in his person. All the mysteries of the divinity must now be unveiled, because the Last Days have come. — All creatures who have fallen into perdition since the birth of Christ must be restored to their original perfection in me; I am the instrument by which God wishes to manifest his glory. — It is to the sublime school of God that Elizabeth brought these revelations; it is the Holy-Spirit who gave birth to them in her heart. — The ordinary preachers of the Gospel have only flattered idols; they know, it is true, how to quarter grossly the rocks [*pierres*] and to clear away the terrain for the future edifice, but they know nothing of construction. In their preaching they dishonor God and seduce their brothers because of their lack of faith, because they say that we are all sinners and they refrain from fulfilling the holy and perfect law, which is to abandon wife and children and follow the Lord.'[479]

Hendrik Niclaes And The Familists

Founded in 1540 by Hendrik Niclaes, the Family of Love — often wrongly defined as an Anabaptist sect — intended to reestablish the original human community in its innocence. Its organization included a bishop, whose authority was supported by twelve sages and four classes of priests. All gave

[479] A. Jundt, *op. cit.,* p. 178.

their personal belongings to the sect. It included a quite large number of faithful, principally in the Netherlands and England, where their existence was still attested to in the Seventeenth Century.

Born in 1502, Hendrik Niclaes claimed that he had his first visions when he was nine years old, while attending a latin school. At the age of 12, he worked in his family's business and took it over upon the death of his father. Arrested in 1529 for Lutheranism, he went to Amsterdam where he stayed for nine years before being suspected of Anabaptism. In 1541, he lived in Emden where he engaged in a flourishing trade in wool. He frequently traveled to Antwerp, where his friend, the printer Christopher Plantin, had been inspired by several of his texts.

At the age of 59, new prophetic visions and the publicity that he gave them brought torture [by the authorities] down upon him. He fled to Kempen, in the Overijssel, then to London, which was a temporary exile because Niclaes opportunely saved Plantin from ruin by transporting to Cologne the typographical materiels threatened with seizure by those who accused the printer of heresy. Dissent within the group darkened his last years. He died in 1580. Nippold attributed to him 50 pamphlets that were distributed clandestinely.

Niclaes' doctrine preached love, tolerance and mutual respect, and rejected the God of justice in favor of a God of goodness. From millenarianism he retained the pretense that he acted as the mediator of divine revelation and the herald of the new era, in which antagonism among mankind would disappear.

His principal disciple was his servant, Hendrik Jansen, called Barrefelt, no doubt due to Barneveld, the place of his birth. Around the time of his break with Niclaes in 1573, he took the name Hiel, which in Hebrew means "one life in God." Having gained the friendship of Christopher Plantin, Hiel began to prophetize on his own, perhaps in England, where the Family of Love had existed for more than a century. Many of these adepts joined the Ranters. His religious doctrine was related to that of Hans Denck.

> 'The Father made himself human among us according to the inward man and edified us according to the inward man in a Spirit with him. The soul of man is not a creature, but a part of the uncreated God.' And so he called himself 'a man whom God raised from among the dead, whom he filled and anointed with the Holy-Spirit; an enlightened man of the Spirit of the celestial truth and the veritable light of the perfect essence; a man deified along with God in the spirit of his love and transformed into the being of God.' According to him, the Christ is only 'the image of the being of the right of God'; he must no longer be envisioned as a historical personage, but as a 'condition' shared by all those who live in union with God. From this metaphysical principle, he deduced that sin no longer exists in the heart of the regenerated: his disciples and he 'only said in their prayers the first three parts of the Dominican oration, because, for them, they did not sin insofar as they were born from God'; he still derived both uselessness and unimportance from religious ceremonies: 'The Lovers live and die without either baptism or the sacraments,' or rather they considered the baptism of infants to be a valueless act that some were free to neglect while others were free to practice. They thus distinguished themselves from the Anabaptists, to whom it was no doubt fitting to link them historically. Hendrik Nicolas [sic] founded his doctrine on the theory of the three ages: 'Moses only preached hope, Christ only taught faith, he himself announced the love that united all.

> The first penetrated into the square in front of the temple, the second into the sanctuary, he himself into the Holy of Holies.'[480]

The Puritan John Knewstub said of Hendrik Niclaes: "He got religion upside-down. He constructed heaven on earth; he made a man of his God and God a man (…). This heaven was games and laughing, [and] hell was grief, affliction and sorrow."[481]

Jan Torrentius

Born in Amsterdam in 1589, Jan Torrentius — charged with Anabaptism, Davidjorism and Familism — cut the figure of an accursed painter in liberal Holland, well, at least in Holland liberated from Catholicism. Painter of still-lifes and so-called erotic paintings, he attempted to illustrate the hedonism celebrated by Dutch painting in the Seventeenth Century with, perhaps, less reservation than Jan Steen.

A member of an Adamite group that practiced the pleasures of love and the table,[482] he was arrested and subjected to torture. He denied all participation in the sect, but the "scandalous" character of his works earned him 20 years in prison.

Freed on the insistence of the ambassador from Austria, he took refuge in England. His return to Amsterdam brought new persecutions from the Protestants until his death in 1640. The government would order his paintings collected and burned by an executioner.[483]

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[480] *Ibid.*, p. 201.

[481] C. Hill, *Le monde a l'envers,* Paris, 1977, p. 25.

[482] *Translator's note*: According to the Rosicrucian order A.M.O.R.C., Torrentius was a member of the Brethren of the Rosie Cross. The date of his death is said to be 1644, not 1640.

[483] *Translator's note*: One painting survived: *Still Life with a Bridle* (1614), which is part of the collection at the Rijsmuseum in Amsterdam.

Chapter 44: Ironists and Sceptics

That the most radical work of the Sixteenth Century (and well beyond), *The Discourse on Voluntary Servitude,*[484] inscribed itself outside of all theological context indicates quite well the disuse of the discourse of God. Religious language, over which the Church and the [various] orthodoxies claimed to exercise control, ceded place to the ideological language in which the changing economy — turning the liberties of yesterday into the constraints of tomorrow — extinguished the blazes that it ceaselessly lit.

If it is true that the principle "He who controls meaning controls the world" has been verified, ecclesiastical power, which conceived no other revolt against it than that of those who were outside of meaning — the senseless, the crazy — began (in the Renaissance) to lose the means of persuasion and terror that somehow or other strengthened the correct line of the dogma around which gravitated the spirit of beings and things, if not their very hearts.

Assuredly, the mockery, sarcasm and irony that whipped the austere and unhealthy ass of religion did not give birth to the tumults of the Sixteenth Century. The difference was that it was formulated in speech [*parole*] and not in writing. Penal history teems with reports such as the one that Jundt made in his study of popular pantheism:

> In 1359, the town council forever banished a certain Claushorn, surnamed Engelbrecht, the school director Selden, and Cuentzelin of Atzenheim because they rapped on a seat of wood and a tripod, and said, 'Here is God; we would like to break his foot,' and because they had effaced the black points with which they were marked and said, 'Here is God, we would like to burst his eyes.' One of them even threw his knife at the sky and cried out, 'I would like to strike God with my knife.'[485]

The formidable network of awakening and deadening that the printed press stretched between towns and countrysides had at first thrown between everyone's hands the two Testaments that were completely filled with the incoherencies, absurdities and infamies through which God manifested his uncertain presence in society. By emphasizing the antitheses contained in the Bible, Johannes Denck abandoned each person to the care of devoting himself (or not) to the convictions of a faith that was intimate and deprived of reason. A little later, those whom the Church called "strong spirits" because they threatened the power of its Holy-Spirit began to disclose in writing the ironies that were capable of dissolving the authority of the Book that, for centuries, had crushed terrestrial and voluptuous life under its weight of guilt, fear, ferocity and contempt.

In this mixture of audacity and pusillanimosity, much remains poorly known.

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[484] *Translator's note*: Written in 1548 by Etienne de la Boetie.

[485] Hegel, *Chroniken von Closener und Koenigshofen,* Leipzig, 1871, extracts in *Livre secret du magistrat de Strasbourg,* II, p. 1201; quoted by A. Jundt, *Histoire du pantheisme populaire, op. cit.,* p. 106.

Valentin Weigel

Despite his weak attachment to violence, Valentin Weigel (1533–1588) does not fail to evoke the parish priest John Meslier. A Lutherian pastor in Zschopau, Weigel led an existence [apparently] deprived of remarkable traits, only to reveal after his death a collection of works, partially published in Halle in 1609, in which he reduced the texts consecrated to the *Apocalypse* and the *Revelations* attributed to John to the name of the Beast, the number of which [*666*] nourished visions of the Third Age. He considered Luther, the Pope, Zwingli and others to be Antichrists, and thought the pastorate to be perfectly useless. Each man possessed in himself the divine spark that, embracing the body and the soul, rendered the Scriptures, grace, the clergy, theology and all historical religion to be null and void. The knowledge of God proceded, not from the Bible nor from the sacraments, but from an inward conviction that one could not restrain.

Dirk Volkertszoon Coornherdt

A polemicist, writer, engraver and humanist, Dirk Coornherdt was among the principal representatives of the Renaissance in Holland. Versatile and courageous, [and] in a country in which Protestant intransigence succeded Catholic intolerance, he led, despite persecution, an incessant fight in favor of religious freedom and against execution for committing heresy. A precursor of free-thinking, he left to each person the care of depending upon his or her own conscience and founding lay morality on the respect for others and a certain stoicism. His belief in a perfection accessible to mankind brought down upon him charges of "Pelagianism," a term already in disuse in the Sixteenth Century.

Born in Amsterdam in 1522, Coornherdt was educated in the Catholic faith, which he never abjured, even under Orangist power; he would especially keep his evangelistic principles. He traveled to Spain and Portugal, became familiar with biblical exegesis, and learned music and engraving. After his return to Amsterdam, he got married in 1540 and then moved to Haarlem, where he became a professional engraver. Around 1544, he discovered the works of Luther, Calvin and Menno Simonsz. In 1550, he wrote *Comedie van de rijcke man,* and shortly thereafter translated Boece's *De consolatione philosophiae.* Coornherdt associated with Hendrik Niclaes, the founder of the Family of Love, with whom he later quarreled, not without maintaining a certain nostalgia for an original, idyllic community. Thanks to Hans Denck, he was also interested in Sebastian Franck and the mystical fragments of the *Deutsche Theologie.* In 1560, Coornherdt took exception to Calvin and Menno. Two years later, Calvin threw at him his *Response to a Certain Dutchman who, under the Guise of making the Christians completely Spiritual permits them to Pollute their Bodies through Idolatry* and, in response to other texts on free will by Coornherdt, would be on his guard against "this man who pushes impiety to the extreme."

A notary at the court of Holland, Coornherdt was successful at making himself suspect to both the Catholics and the Reformers. Following the riots of the iconoclasts, in which his role has not been clearly established, he was imprisoned at The Hague in 1567. He used his detention to write short texts and pamphlets; he escaped in 1568 and was a secret agent for the Prince of Orange, despite the hostility of the Protestants, until 1572. He returned to Haarlem and, charged in a report about the "Beggars" led by Lumey, he denounced their brutalities and abuses of power, and thus attracted their hatred. Coornherdt hid himself in Leyden, then Zamten. When Requesens, the Governor of the Netherlands, announced a general pardon in 1574, Coornherdt was excluded. He didn't hesitate to

address himself to Philippe II in the hope of recovering his confiscated goods. From whence comes his reputation, which followed him, for "playing all the angles" [*manger a tous les rateliers*].

When Coornherdt returned to Holland, the hostility of the Reformers towards him had grown and he did nothing to attenuate it. He defended the Catholic minority, which was oppressed in Holland; he produced many appeals for tolerance; he pronounced himself opposed to the death penalty for dissidents of all stripes; and he translated the writings of Sebastian Castellion. It was only because of the influence of William of Orange that Coornherdt was not condemned to life in prison. Chased from Haarlem in 1585, he went to Emden, where he published a work of Stoic inspiration in 1586. Banished from Delft after a stay of three months, he sought refuge in Gouda and died there on 29 October 1590.

In Coornherdt one sees the passage of Christian morality into lay morality, enriched with ideas of tolerance and freedom of spirit. The influence of the mystics and Denck appeared in a language stripped of its sacred references, in an exhortation for the mutual respect of individuals. Finally, the idea that mankind can attain perfection through a constant effort of will, so that it can no longer sin, appears in Pelage's theses and not — as one sometimes reproached Coornherdt — in the doctrines of the Spiritual Libertines.

Bernardino Ochino

The humanist Bernardino Ochino (1487–1564) practiced all of the religions and doctrines of his time for nearly 80 years. He did not wait for the first fruits of old age to affirm — despite the risks of a contrasted destiny — that the unique value of life is found in terrestrial favors and savors. Born in Sienna in the neighborhood of Oca, from which he drew his name, he entered the Franciscan order and became a nasturtium [*capucin*] preacher. He met Juan of Valdes and let himself be seduced by Luther's ideas. Ochino broke with Catholicism and went to Geneva, where his tolerant spirit was found to be repugnant to Calvin. He then went to Augsburg, Strasbourg and Canterbury, where he vituperated the Pope. He wrote *The Labyrinth of Free Will or, to speak truly, Servile Will and the Means of Getting Out of It.* As he recovered from [attachment to] all systems, he professed a discreet atheism, allied with a Rabelaisian quest for pleasure. At the time, one attributed to him — and no doubt falsely — authorship of *The Book of the Three Impostors,* which was imputed to other adventurers of his type and whose influence merits being better studied:[486] Simon of Neufrille (from Hainaut), who died in Padua in 1530, a disciple of the skeptic Christopher of Longueil, himself the teacher of Etienne Dolet.

At the age of 60, Ochino wed a young woman. His *Dialoghi XXX,* which celebrated the merits of polygamy, caused his expulsion from Zurich in 1563. He took refuge in Poland, then in Slavkov (Austerlitz) in Moravia, where he succumbed to the plague in 1565.[487]

Noel Journet

Originally a schoolteacher from Suzanne, near Attigny-en-Rethellois, Noel Journet was among the disciples of Dirk Coornherdt, whom he met during a visit to the Netherlands. He inscribed himself in the line of Johannes Denck through his attention to the inconsistencies and absurdities in the Bible.

[486] *Translator's note*: There appears to be text missing from here.
[487] R. Bainton, *Bernardino Ochino,* 1940.

The publication of his commentaries drew down upon him the denunciations of the Calvinists, who had him burned, along with his book, on 29 June 1582.[488]

Pastor John Chassanion found it useful to refute the lampoon, which thus attached his name to the annals of the infamy of informers and Journet's name to the unfortunates of reason.

The Refutation of the Strange Errors and Horrible Blasphemies against God and the Holy Scriptures and the Holy Prophets and Apostles made by a certain Misfortunate Person who for such Impieties was justly Condemned to Die and who was Burned in the City of Metz on 29 June, the year of Our Lord MDLXXXII, by John Chassanion, Minister of the Reformed Church of Metz quotes the following statements, among others:

> 'Moses was an enemy of humankind, a captain of murderers and brigands. He gave the orders into the hearts of all to sack [the place] when they entered Canaan, to kill the women and all the male children who had been spared by the downfall of the Madianites, only preserving the virginal girls (*Nb* 31, 17–18; *Dt* 7, 2).'
>
> 'Jacob was a deceiver. He notably used striped sticks to influence the color of the lambs and to increase his portion of the animals (*Gn* 30, 37–42).'
>
> 'Moses did not write the *Pentateuch,* seeing that his own death is related at the end of it (*Dt* 34).'
>
> '*Deuteronomy* was drafted in the land of Canaan, because it says, *Dt* 4, 47, that the children of Israel possessed the land of the two Amorean kings *beyond* the Jordan.'

Other affirmations more surely brought upon him the sanctions of the justice. He did indeed declare that the magistrates were all "tyrants and thieves," that the great ones [*les tailles*] were "true tyrants" and that "a woman no longer married according to her tastes can take another husband so as to avoid debauchery."

Geoffroy Vallee

Geoffroy Vallee owed his new name and premature death to a lampoon entitled *The Beatitude of the Christians, or the Scourge of Faith.* Born in Orleans around 1550, the "beautiful Valley," as his libertine friends called him, allied with the search for the pleasures of existence the taste for publicly critiquing the things that hindered and perverted them. He pushed imprudence as far as signing his name to a pamphlet that was directed, not only against the [established] religions, but against all beliefs, which were all founded on fear, according to him. Sometimes distributed under the title *De arte nihil credendi* [*The Art of Believing in Nothing*], this text was accused of committing divine high treason. Arrested on the orders of the Provost-Marshal Nicolas Rapin, Vallee soon thereafter benefited from the support and friendship of the libertine aristocracy that the Seventeenth Century took pride in: people like Desbarreaux (whose great-uncle was Geoffroy), Claude the Small, Belurgey, Theophile of Viau, Blot, and Cyrano de Bergerac, who were free spirits who often despaired of the prohibitions that sanctioned the simple aspiration to live well.

The defense [in Geoffroy's trial], adopting an old argument of the Church, invoked the "senseless" character of the writing and its author. Rapin was inclined to grant a relative leniency if the Bishop

[488]R. Peter, "Noel Journet, detracteur de l'Ecriture sainte (1582)," in *Croyants et sceptiques.*

of Nevers, Armand Sorbin, did not personally intervene to demand the youthful man's execution. On 9 February 1574, Geoffroy Vallee, 84 years old, was hanged then burned. The Jesuit Garasse rejoiced at the "beautiful sacrifice to God at Greve, where he [Geoffroy] was burned half-alive."[489]

Geoffroy Vallee condemned to execration "this [religious] faith, since it wants all that we are lodged within it, for all of our lives, even to the point of singing the Credo to us at death." He successively examined the Catholic faith, "from which comes all evil" and that forged the fear of the devil and the executioners; the faith of the Hugeunots, with their "false intelligence (and) fear and baton blows, so that, if they do not believe, they can not be saved." The faith of the Anabaptists and that of the Libertines were hardly better. Even atheism didn't find a place, because "I take my sensual pleasure in God; only in God have I torment"; atheism does not abandon the fear that is inherent in all beliefs. "All the religions," he wrote, with a great lucidity, "have removed from mankind the happiness of the body in God so as to render it still more miserable."

In sum, the important thing isn't believing or not believing, but being without fear: "He who is in fear, whatever fear it is, cannot be happy." Thus one must banish the fear inherent in all the faiths so as to have "reason in one's head, without seeking it outside oneself or in the sword." Here Vallee attained a radicality of which the Libertines of the Seventeenth Century, the atheists of the Eighteenth Century and the free-thinkers of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries were ignorant. (The interest of such humanists as Paracelsus, Agrippa of Nettesheim, Guillaume Postel, Tommaso Campanella, Giordano Bruno and Lucio Vanini reveals more than the history of philosophy.)

[489] F. Lachevre, *L'Ancetre des libertins du XVII siecle, Geoffroy Vallee, brule le 9 fevrier 1574, et la "Beatitude des chretiens,"* Paris, 1920.

Chapter 45: Levellers, Diggers and Ranters

By decapitating King Charles (1649), the English Revolution removed God from public affairs. Cromwell's instauration of a new republic, which was profitable for the interests of the small landowners and the bourgeoisie, revived (with the breath of freedom) the fire of working-class insurrection that had not ceased to smolder since the days of John Ball. More than anywhere else, the legends of Robin Hood and the beloved brigand had, in England, illustrated the idea — widely held, all things considered — that robbing the rich so as to soften the misfortunes of the poor restored the natural obligations of solidarity.

The development of Protestantism as the ideology of emerging modern capitalism broke the old structure of the religious myth, at the same time that the barriers and walls raised everywhere by feudalism and the predominance of the agrarian economy ceded place to the free circulation of commodities. Despite the fact that it remained inflexible in its principle of infeudating the masters of the heavens and the earth, religion proceeded towards the status of an ideology, in which it was reduced by the processes of desacralization and marginalization with respect to nationalism, liberalism, socialism, fascism and communism. Opening itself to the bourgeois virtues of formal tolerance, despite the high and mighty, the Protestant religion multiplied the diversity of the sects like chains enclosed in a unique ring, forged in a divine spirit of guilt and repressed pleasures.

Such was the vengeance of the Judeo-Christian religions that, stripped of the weapons of divine justice and theocratic language, they impregnated the ideologies that were the most hostile to their ritualized pretenses with the odors of sacrifice, sin, mortifying compulsion and voluntary servitude.

Levellers And Diggers

At the moment that, according to the formula of Winstanley, "the old world … is running up like parchment in the fire,"[490] the Levellers and the Diggers inscribed themselves less in a religious current than in the framework of a social and economic revolution.

The favors given to the small landowners by Cromwell led to increases in the price of rented land, which condemned tenant farmers to hire themselves out as day laborers or shepherds. Starting in 1649, the Levellers formed the left-wing of Cromwell's troops under the leadership of John Lilburne (1614–1657). [Christopher Hill writes:]

> Whilst food prices reached famine levels, the Levellers demanded re-election of Agitators and recall of the General Council of the Army. 'We were before ruled by King, Lords and Commons, now by a General, a Court Martial and House of Commons; and we pray you what is the difference?' At the end of March [1649], Lilburne, Overton, Walwyn and Prince were arrested. A Leveller pamphlet, *More Light Shining in Buckinghamshire,* appealed to

[490] C. Hill, *Le Monde a l'envers,* Paris, 1977, p. 15. [*Translator's note*: this is the French translation of Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down,* London, 1972, p. 14. Rather than translate Hill back into English, we have — here as elsewhere in this chapter — quoted directly from the reprint of *The World Turned Upside Down* published by Penguin in 1991.]

> the soldiers 'to stand everyone in his place, to oppose all tyranny whatsoever,' particularly that of the lawyers, enclosed lords of manors and the Army Grandees who have rejected social reform and have done nothing for the poor.
>
> Next month mutinies broke out in the Army when men who refused to volunteer for service in Ireland were demobilized without payment of arrears — exactly what had driven the Army to revolt two years earlier, though then with the acquiescence of the generals. In May more serious revolts broke out among troops in Oxfordshire, Wiltshire and Buckinghamshire, and there were rumors of civilian support from the Southwest, the old Clubmen area. Cromwell and Fairfax, acting with great rigor and determination, overwhelmingly defeated the mutinous regiments at Burford on 14 May. The period of crisis for the military regime was over. Frightened conservatives rallied to its support, as the lesser evil. Oxford University and the City of London hastened to honor Fairfax and Cromwell. The sermon preached on the latter occasion appropriately denounced those who aspired to remove their neighbor's landmark. Leveller conspiracies continued (…): but none of them offered a serious threat to the regime so long as the repeatedly purged Army remained securely under the control of the generals.
>
> Nevertheless, the early months of 1649 had been a terrifying time for the men of property. It was for some time not so obvious to contemporaries as it is to us that the defeat at Burford had been final and decisive. As late as November 1649 Ralph Josselin tells us that men feared to travel because of danger from robbers, and the rich even felt insecure in their own houses. Poor people, he added the following month, 'were never more regardless of God than nowadays.'[491]

Kept out of a political scene in which they figured less through popular support than through a democratic aspiration that animated their speeches and manifestoes, the Levellers revealed, by withdrawing, the presence of rural agitators who were engaged in struggles against the local powers and who were determined to instaurate collective ownership of the farm lands. The movement of the Diggers was characterized by a clear rejection of religious obedience.

In April 1649, in Walton-on-Thames, six soldiers invaded the church and announced the suppression *en bloc* of tithes, ministers of agriculture, magistrates, the Bible and the "Sabbath."[492] Not far from there, day laborers attempted to dig the fallow lands, thereby signifying their seizure of the commons. They choose Sunday in a deliberate attempt to annul the government of time that the Church had arrogated for itself since the Sixth Century.

With the Diggers, the social revolution rejoined the tradition of the incendiaries who annihilated God in his temples and ministers. Ever since 1630, England had experienced a wave of church destruction that prolonged the iconoclasm of the Netherlands in the preceding century, but with more consequence, since the Bible was quite often also condemned to the fire or execration. As Clement Writer, a clothier from Worcester wrote in his *Fides divina* (1657): "No testimony that is fallible and liable to error can possibly be a divine testimony."[493]

The number of Diggers centered around Gerrard Winstanley, a small, ruined merchant who became a salaried farmer at Walton-on-Thames, grew rapidly.

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[491] *Ibid.,* pp. 88 and 89. [*Translator's note*: C. Hill, pp. 108–109.]
[492] *Ibid.,* p. 90. [*Translator's note*: C. Hill, p. 109.]
[493] *Ibid.,* p. 207. [*Translator's note*: C. Hill, p. 265.]

A vision enjoined him to spread the news that "the earth should be made a common treasury of livelihood to whole mankind, without respect of persons."[494] The agitation of Winstanley invaded the south and center of England, where the Diggers dug, manured and seeded the communal fallow lands. While Winstanley produced many pamphlets between 1649 and 1650, John Lilburne, the leaders of the Levellers, condemned the "erroneous tenets of the poor Diggers" and "repudiated any idea of abolishing property."[495] [Christopher Hill writes:]

> For Winstanley, Jesus Christ was the Head Leveller. Winstanley's thought incorporated many Leveller ideas: it goes beyond them, beyond the vision of the small proprietor, in its hostility to private property as such.
>
> > "In the beginning of time the great creator, Reason, made the earth to be a common treasury, to preserve beasts, birds, fishes and man, the lord that was to govern this creation… But not one word was spoken in the beginning that one branch of mankind should rule over another… But … selfish imaginations … did set up one man to teach and rule over another. And thereby … man was brought into bondage, and became a greater slave to such of his own kind than the beasts of the field were to him. And hereupon the earth … was hedged in to enclosures by the teachers and rulers, and the others were made … slaves. And that earth, that is within this Creation made a common storehouse for all, is bought and sold and kept in the hands of a few, whereby the great Creator is mightily dishonored, as if he were a respecter of persons, delighting in the comfortable livelihood of some and rejoicing in the miserable poverty and straits of others. From the beginning it was not so… "
>
> Winstanley told lords of manors that:
>
> > "… the power of enclosing land and owning property was brought into the Creation by your ancestors by the sword; which first did murder their fellow creatures, men, and after plunder or steal away their land, and left this land successively to you, their children. And therefore, though you did not kill or thieve, yet you hold that cursed thing in your hand by the power of the sword; and so you justify the wicked deeds of your fathers, and that sin of your fathers shall be visited upon the head of you and your children to the third and fourth generation, and longer too, till your bloody and thieving power be rooted out of the land."
>
> Winstanley extended the Leveller justification of political democracy to economic democracy:
>
> > "The poorest man hath as true a title and just right to land as the richest man… True freedom lies in the free enjoyment of the earth… If the common people have no more freedom in England but only to live among their elder brothers

[494] *Ibid.,* p. 91. [*Translator's note*: C. Hill, p. 112.]

[495] *Translator's note*: *The World Turned Upside Turn,* p. 119. Note that while Hill attributes the first quote to Lilburne, *A Whip for the Present House of Lords* (February, 1647–8), anthologized in *The Leveller Tracts, 1647–1653* (Columbia University Press, 1944), p. 449, the second quote is actually Hill's own summary.

> and work for them for hire, what freedom then have they in England more than they can have in Turkey or France?"

Winstanley transcended the Leveller theory of the Norman Yoke, that all we need is to get back to the laws of the free Anglo-Saxons. "The best laws that England hath," he declared, "are yokes and manacles, tying one sort of people to another." "All laws that are not grounded upon equity and reason, not giving a universal freedom to all but respecting persons, ought … to be cut off with the King's head." But the England's rulers had not completed the Revolution […].

Winstanley must have been expressing the opinions of many disappointed radicals when he wrote in 1652:

> "Therefore, you Army of England's Commonwealth, look to it! The enemy could not beat you in the field, but they may be too hard for you by policy in counsel if you do not stick close to see common freedom established. For if so be that kingly authority be set up in your laws again, King Charles hath conquered you and your posterity by policy, and won the field of you, though you seemingly have cut off his head."[496]

Winstanley went even further when he demanded the suppression of the prison and emphasized that all laws must be corrective, not punitive. He was, before the philosophers, one of the first to demand that reason be substituted for divine providence (especially profitable for the exploiters) in the government of societies.

> "What is the reason," Winstanley asked, "that most people are so ignorant of their freedoms, and so few fit to be chosen commonwealth's officers? Because," he replied, "the old kingly clergy … are continually distilling their blind principles into the people, and do thereby nurse up ignorance in them." Many of them had taught that Charles I was the Lord's Anointed. Priests "lay claim to heaven after they are dead, and yet they require their heaven in this world, too, and grumble mightily against the people that will not give them a large temporal maintenance. And yet they tell the people that they must be content with their poverty, and they shall have their heaven hereafter. But why may not we have our heaven here (that is, a comfortable livelihood in the earth) and heaven hereafter too, as well as you? … While men are gazing up to heaven, imagining after a happiness or fearing a hell after they are dead, their eyes are put out, that they see not what is their birthrights, and what is to be done by them here on earth while they are living."

A traditional Christian, who "thinks God is in the heavens above the skies, and so prays to that God which he imagines to be there and everywhere, … worships his own imagination, which is the devil." "Your Savior must be a power within you, to deliver you from that bondage within; the outward Christ or the outward God are but men Saviors." Winstanley himself came to use the word Reason in preference to God, "because I have been held under darkness by that word, as I see many people are." We must be careful

[496] *Ibid.,* pp. 105–107. [*Translator's note*: C. Hill, pp. 132–134.]

> "lest we dishonor the Lord in making him the author of the creatures' misery," as hell-fire preachers do. Winstanley spoke of their God in terms which came near to William Blake's Nobodaddy — unless we are to suppose he held a completely Manichean dualism, which is unlikely. Winstanley told "priests and zealous professors" that they worshipped the devil. He spoke of "the God Devil." "The outward Christ, or the outward God … sometimes proves devils." He told his opponents in Kingston court that "that God whom you serve, and which did entitle you lords, knights, gentlemen and landlords, is covetousness." This God gave men a claim to private property in land. He "appointed the people to pay tithes to the clergy." It is this God-Devil that the state Church worships. "We will neither come to church nor serve their God."[497]

Close to the partisans of Jacob Boehme who, around 1640, began to appear in England, Winstanley refused to venerate any other Christ than the symbol of the resurrection of man in himself. Eden was humanity seeking to reconstruct the innocent conditions destroyed by covetousness and appropriation. However, if Winstanley believed that sin was a lucrative invention of the clergy, he never adopted the views of the Ranters, who revoked it in the name of pleasure and the natural liberties that it founded.

During the punitive expeditions against the Diggers, many sects — such as the Seekers and the Quakers — recuperated their popularity and stripped them of their subversive practices, and rapidly acceded to the status of Churches due to their selective tolerance for whomever did not threaten the foundations of religion and the established order.

The Ranters

Luther and Calvin removed from sin the insurance contract that the Roman Church had imposed by means of confession and redemption. Sin, which the payment of a fee no longer alleviated, was only a more frightening burden for the creature exposed to the libidinous temptations of the Evil One.

In the tradition of the Free-Spirit, the Ranters affirmed their absolute rejection of all guilt through the imprescriptible right to enjoy the benefits of existence.

> At one Ranter meeting of which we have a (hostile) report, the mixed company met at a tavern, sang blasphemous songs to the well-known tunes of metrical psalms and partook of a communal feast. One of them tore off a piece of beef, saying 'This is the flesh of Christ, take and eat.'(*) Another threw a cup of ale into the chimney corner, saying 'There is the blood of Christ.' Clarkson called a tavern the house of God; sack was divinity. Even a Puritan enemy expresses what is almost a grudging admiration for the high spirits of the Ranters' dionysiac orgies: 'they are the merriest of all devils for extempore lascivious songs, … for health, music, downright bawdry and dancing.'[498]

(*) These remarks recall those of Claushorn and his friends, who were banished from Strasbourg in 1359. Such was the ordinary treatment of God when joy and drink loosened the language of the religion that tied it.

[497] *Ibid.,* pp. 112 and 113. [*Translator's note*: C. Hill, pp. 140–142.]
[498] *Ibid.,* p. 159. [*Translator's note*: C. Hill, pp. 200–201.]

Spontaneously rediscovering the pleasantries that, in 1359, got three gay blades banished from Strasbourg, a Ranter affirmed: "If I should worship the sun or the moon, or that pewter pot on the table, nobody has anything to do with it."[499] Captain Francis Freeman, a great amateur at ribald songs, declared that he saw God in the table and the candlestick.

Captain Underhill restored theological speculations to their terrestrial origins and meanings with as much lucidity as humor when he explained that "the Spirit had sent into him the witness of free grace, while he was in the moderate enjoyment of the creature called tobacco."[500]

Certain Ranters denied the existence of the Christ or, affirming themselves to be the Christ or God, joyously authorized themselves all license.

If a God existed, Jacob Bauthumley proclaimed, he was in himself and every living thing, in "man and beast, fish and fowl, every green thing from the highest cedar to the ivy on the wall." "He does not exist outside the creatures." God is in "this dog, this tobacco pipe, he is in me and I am in him."[501] (In the Eighteenth Century, a similar spirit animated Christopher Smart's poetic work *Jubilate Agno.*)

Active between 1649 and 1651, the Ranters were not constituted as organized groups and none of them took the title of leader or master thinker. They contented themselves with leading joyous lives and spreading good cheer [*conscience*]. It was unfortunate that a Scottish peasant named Jack was hanged in 1656 for denying the existence of heaven, hell, God and the Christ, because the Ranters, in their taste for terrestrial existence, made it a duty to avoid martyrdom through a prompt retraction.

Abiezer Coppe

Originally from Warwick, a student at Oxford and then a preacher in the army, Coppe was 30 when he gained the reputation as a Ranter. In 1649, he published *Some sweet sips of some spirituall wine* and, with the same taste for alliteration, *A Fiery Flying Roll.*

Here, there was no lying prophecy dictated by God. The message emanated from "my most excellent majesty and glory (in me) … who am universal love, and whose service is perfect freedom and pure libertinism." Coppe proclaimed: "Sin and Transgression is finished and ended," because God, "that mighty Leveller," prepares to "lay the Mountains low."[502]

At first, Coppe was among the radical wing of the Levellers. He called for cutting "the neck of horrid pride," which was the cause of all spilled blood. Bishops, kings, lords and the great ones of this world must disappear so that "parity, equality and community" could assure the reign of "universal love, universal peace and perfect freedom."

The "betrayal" of the Levellers accentuated for him the feeling of the necessary unity between individual pleasure and the interdependent struggle against the powerful. He recounted how, in the middle of the street, he hurled his contempt at the men and women of the highest rank, taking exception to the coaches and their occupants. "Hide not thyself from thine own flesh," he wrote, "from a cripple, a rogue, a beggar, … a whoremonger, a thief, etc., he's thine own flesh."[503] Addressing himself to the rich, he threatened them:

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[499] *Ibid.* [*Translator's note*: C. Hill, p. 200: "Quoted by Masson, *Life of Milton,* III, p. 525."]

[500] *Ibid.* [*Translator's note*: C. Hill, p. 200.]

[501] J. Bauthumley, *The Light and Dark Sides of God,* 1650, p.4. [*Translator's note*: C. Hill, p. 206. Note that the third quotation is from Edward Hide, *A Wonder, yet no Wonder* (1651), pp. 35–41, who was an *opponent* of the Ranters.]

[502] C. Hill, pp. 166–168. [*Translator's note*: C. Hill, p. 210. See also Abiezer Coppe, *Selected Writings,* London, 1987, pp. 16 and 20.]

[503] *Translator's note*: C. Hill, p. 211.

> Thou hast many bags of money, and behold I come as a thief in the night, with my sword drawn in my hand, and like a thief as I am, — I say deliver your purse, deliver sirrah! deliver or I'll cut thy throat!
>
> I say (once more) deliver, deliver, my money … to rogues, thieves, whores and cutpurses, who are flesh of thy flesh, and every whit as good as thyself in mine eye, who are ready to starve in plaguey Gaols and nasty dungeons…
>
> The plague of God is in your purses, barns, houses, horses, murrain will take your hogs, O (ye fat swine of the earth) who shall shortly go to the knife, and be hung up in the roof except …
>
> Did you not see my hand, this last year, stretched out? You did not see. My hand is stretched out still… Your gold and silver, though you can't see it, is cankered… The rust of your silver, I say, shall eat your flesh as if it were fire… Have all things in common, or else the plague of God will rot and consume all that you have.[504]

But at the same time, Coppe perceived in the happiness of serving his pleasures a guarantee of peace and a prevention against violence: "Not by the sword; we (holily) scorn to fight for any thing; we had as lief be dead drunk every day of the week and lie with whores in the marketplace, and account them as good actions as taking the poor abused, enslaved ploughman's money from him."[505]

In 1650, Parliament condemned *A Fiery Flying Roll,* judged to be full of "many horrid blasphemies,"[506] to the flames and sent Coppe himself to prison in Newgate. In exchange for his release, he drafted a partial retraction, then another one that was more complete but whose malicious reservations suggested the actions' lack of sincerity. (Thus Coppe did not abstain from being ironic in the manner of Jacques Gruet or Noel Journet: "God forbids killing but tells Abraham to slay his son; [he forbids] adultery, but tells Hosea to take a wife of whoredom." He proclaimed that it is "the community which is sinful" but added that "if the flesh of my flesh be ready to perish, [and] if I have bread, it shall or should be his." Instead of recognizing the notion of sin, he declared "the laying of nets, traps and snares for the feet of our neighbors is a sin, whether men imagine it to be so or no; and so is the not undoing of heavy burdens, the not letting the oppressed go free, the not healing every yoke, and the not dealing of bread to the hungry … whether men imagine it to be so or no.")[507] After the Restoration, prudence enjoined Coppe to change his name. He became a physician and was esteemed in the small town of Barnes, in Surrey. He pushed humor as far as having himself buried at the parish church.

Lawrence Clarkson

A wandering preacher, born in Preston, Clarkson — raised as a Puritan — very quickly acquired an equal repugnance for all the sects and the clerical profession: "Thousands better than your parish priests have saluted the gallows. It is more commendable to take a purse by the highway than com-

[504] *Translator's note*: C. Hill, p. 211. See also Abiezer Coppe, p. 38.
[505] *Translator's note*: C. Hill, p. 211. See also Abiezer Coppe, p. 24.
[506] *Translator's note*: C. Hill, p. 212. See also Abiezer Coppe, p. 111.
[507] *Translator's note*: C. Hill, pp. 212–213.

pel any of the parish to maintain such that seek their ruin, whose doctrine is poisonable to their consciences."[508]

A Leveller in 1647, he rallied to the Ranters and maintained that — God being in all living things and in matter — all action comes from him and nothing is a sin in his eyes, not even the crucifixion of the Christ. There is neither heaven nor hell beyond mankind. He publicly declared that "I really believed no Moses, Prophets, Christ or Apostles." "There is no such act as drunkenness, adultery and theft in God… Sin hath its conception only in the imagination… What act soever is done by thee in light and love, is light and lovely, though it be that act called adultery… No matter what Scripture, saints or churches say, if that within thee do not condemn thee, thou shalt not be condemned."[509]

"None," he wrote, "can be free from sin till in purity it can be acted as no sin, for I judged that pure to me which to a dark understanding was impure."[510]

Clarkson lived joyously in sweetness and love, traveling the country in the company of Mrs Star, seeking adventure with other women, but being "careful for moneys for my wife," amusing himself with an assembly of Ranters among whom "Dr Paget's maid stripped herself naked and skipped."[511]

Arrested in 1650, he asserted his rights as "a freeborn subject," was condemned to exile and pardoned, no doubt following a retraction. From then on, he quieted down, trained in magic and astrology so as to join Muggleton's sect, which was one of the many groups that has continued to exist in the fog of millenarianism and the apocalypse.

Jacob Bauthumley

A shoemaker like Boehme, Bauthumley fell into the hands of the authorities in 1650 for having published *The Light and Dark Sides of God.* Accused of blasphemy, he was punished by having his tongue pierced by a red-hot poker. Milton admired him and shared many of ideas.

The light of God showed its presence in every thing: "Not the least flower or herb in the field but there is the divine being by which it is that which it is; and as that departs out of it, so it comes to nothing, and so it is today clothed by God, and tomorrow cast into the oven." "All the creatures of the world … are but one entire being." "Nothing that partakes of the divine nature, or is of God, but is God." God does not love one man more than another: all are fellows in his eyes. God "as really and substantially dwells in the flesh of other men and creatures as well as in the man Christ." There where God dwells is "all the heaven I look ever to enjoy."[512]

Sin belongs to the dark side of God. It is an absence of light. "The reason why we call some men wicked and some godly is not any thing in the man, but as the divine being appears more gloriously in them… . God is no more provoked by sin to wrath than he is allured to blessing by my holiness." And Bauthumley specified that "according to the counsel of his will, they did no more that crucified Christ, than they that did embrace him."[513]

Bauthumley denied the existence of hell and the Demon. The resurrection was a purely inward act and did not take place in the beyond.

[508] *Translator's note*: C. Hill, p. 214.
[509] *Translator's note*: C. Hill, pp. 214–215.
[510] *Translator's note*: C. Hill, p. 216.
[511] *Translator's note*: C. Hill, *ibid.*
[512] *Translator's note*: C. Hill, p. 219.
[513] *Translator's note*: C. Hill, pp. 219–210.

He also ended up a respectable citizen of his native town, Leicester[shire], where he became a bookseller.

Thomas Webbe

The Rector of Langley Burnhill, Webbe seemed to glumly promise not to receive tithes from his parishioners. His popularity, already assured by a measure that no Church would tolerate, found itself strongly strengthened when he proclaimed from the pulpit that he hoped to live quite a long time so as to see "no such thing as a parsonage or minister in England." To propagate such remarks, the French parish-priest Meslier took the useful precaution of dying first.

During the 1650s, Webbe was accused of having constituted "a Babel of profaneness and community." An admirer of Coppe, he said a remarkable thing in a letter to Joseph Salmon: "The Lord grant that we may know the worth of hell, that we may for ever scorn heaven."

In 1650, the notables — careful to separate themselves from him — charged him with adultery, then a crime punished by execution on the gallows. He won an acquittal. He claimed [according to a witness] to "live above ordinances and that it was lawful for him to lie with any woman." One attributes to him this witticism: "There is no heaven but women, nor no hell save marriage."[514] His enemies managed to get him banished.

Coppin, Pordage And Tany

Richard Coppin was part of the moderate wing of the Ranters; he was satisfied with a pantheism in which theology had the upper hand over the refusal of social and moral imperatives. "God is all in one, and so is in everyone," he wrote in *Divine Teachings.* "The same all which is in me, is in thee; the same God dwells in one dwells in another, even in all; and in the same fullness as he is in one, he is in everyone." Resurrection consists of coming out of the grave, which is in us and in the Scriptures, so as to be reborn as "the new man [who] sinneth not."[515]

Coppin refused the Church in the name of his own experience of the Lord. Referring to the decree of 1650, which abolished the obligatory nature of Sunday services, he spoke of "the anti-christian law of compelling men to church."[516] Arrested in 1655, Coppin was condemned to six months in prison.

The Vicar of Reading, then the Rector of Bradfield, John Pordage — a disciple of Jacob Boehme — drew the attention of the authorities in 1655 for propagating the Ranters' opinions. He denied the historical existence of the Christ, believed in the presence of God in each person, refused [the notion of] sin, held marriage to be a harmful institution, and announced the imminent disappearance of Parliament, the magistrature, the government of England and all the higher powers, which "he cared no more for … than this dust beneath his feet."[517]

His friend Thomas Tany, called Theaureaujohn, estimated that no man can lose his redemption. But he went further than this and maintained that all religion is "a lie, a fraud, a deceit, for there is but one truth and that is love." He also demanded that the people's lands were rendered to the people. In 1654, Tany made an exemplary gesture, one of rare audacity. With a beautiful critical concision, he

[514] *Translator's note*: All quotes attributed to Thomas Webbe come from C. Hill, p. 227.
[515] *Translator's note*: C. Hill, pp. 220–221.
[516] *Translator's note*: C. Hill, p. 222.
[517] *Translator's note*: C. Hill, p. 225.

burned a copy of the Bible at Saint George's Fields, "because the people say it is the Word of God, and it is not."[518]

[518] *Translator's note*: C. Hill, p. 226.

Chapter 46: The Jansenists

While Holland and England, both of which acclimated themselves to the formal freedoms of the bourgeois revolution, engendered a multitude of sects whose language — still taking on theological artifices — less and less dissimulated their ideological texture, the Catholic countries, which were prey to the distraction of the Counter-Reformation, once again found in monarchal and pontifical absolutism the guarantee of a Catholicism that was restored to its temporal and spiritual powers.

Indulging in the Constantinian parody of the divine right, Louis XIV persisted in dissimulating — under the pomp of a Church in which Bossuet enjoyed Lully[519] — the pusillanimities of a tormented nature, corroded by the sourness of prestige. The sun, with which (in the manner of the mediocre ones) he claimed to crown himself, only dispensed its light upon the courtiers of literature and the arts, apt to dilute their genius in the artifice of panegyric. On the other hand, obscurantism did not spare free spirits such as Cyrano de Bergerac, the peasants reduced by famine and the rapacity of the tax collectors, or the Protestants condemned by the thousands to the galleys. This was the reign of the hypocrites, who threw upon the pyre the poet Claude the Small for having celebrated the art of fucking while the sovereign bathed the bed of his ancillary couplings with remorse.

The quarrel of Jansenism thus inscribed itself in the archaic framework of theological disputes and the political tradition in which the temporal masters claimed that they should be legislators in spiritual matters.

Michel Baius

Born in 1515 in Meslin-l'Eveque in the Hainaut region, Michel Baius (or de Bay) undertook — as a fervent Catholic and Doctor of the University of Louvain — to combat Lutheranism and Calvinism, which became widespread in the Netherlands by basing themselves on the Scriptures that were erected as the supreme authority by the Protestants.

With his friend John Hessels, Baius opposed to Calvin — for whom the irremediably bad human being was completely in the capricious hands of God — a manner of softening the doctrine that went back to Augustine of Hippone. For Baius, nature was originally good, but eminently corruptible. Adam sinned freely and, through his sin, lost the control he had exercised over his senses. Ever since then, mankind has felt the attraction of concupiscence so vividly that he cannot resist it.

From the Augustinian notion of predestination Calvin induced the idea that, saved or damned by God's will alone, the [human] creature had no other choice but to assume the burden of his misery as if it were a constant torment in which all pleasure was obscenely dissonant. But predestination also offered to all humans the argument according to which everything was permitted because God mocked human efforts [*oeuvres*]. Hardly to be suspected of debauchery and licentiousness, Baius

[519] *Translator's note*: Jean-Baptiste de Lully (1632–1687) was an Italian-born French composer, attached to the court of Louis XIV. Jacques-Benigne Bossuet (1627–1704) was a French bishop and theologian.

merely opened part-way the door of theological free will onto the desperate soaking to which the devout Reformers devoted themselves.

At first, the conceptions of Baius and Hessels did not shock the Cardinal of Granvelle, who was the Governor of the Netherlands, nor the papacy, since the two theologians participated in the Council of Trente.

Even when Pius V reacted in a Papal Bull by condemning 73 propositions advanced by Baius, he — whose name had not been mentioned — remained the Chancellor of the University of Louvain and submitted a retraction in good graces.

Among his adepts were a Louvainist theologian, Jacques Janson, and the Bishop of Ypres, Cornelius Jansenius, who swore to wash Baius's reputation of suspicions of heterodoxy, which were unmerited in their eyes.

Meanwhile, the Jesuit Lessius revived the quarrel in the milieus that were lying in wait for theological speculations to which they attributed public interest that the majority of the people — already sufficiently encumbered by the constraints of Mass, the sacraments and ecclesiastical rituals — easily dispensed with.

Lessius estimated that sinners lost nothing of their means to accede to the eternal life of the heavens. He agreed with the Spanish Jesuit Luis Molina (1536–1600), for whom the divine presence did not hinder mankind's free will in its choice between good and evil.

In the wooden language of theology, this was expressed by the discord between the theses expounded by Molina in *The Concordance of Grace and Free Will* and Jansenism, unless it was in fact the dissent between the Christian presence that governed the world at the cost of necessary compromises and an eremitic Christianity that sought in retreat (far from the world) the feverish and anguished approach of an intransigent God. As Moliere illustrated the situation, it was Tartuffe against the misanthrope of Port-Royal.[520]

Cornelius Jansenius

Born in 1585 near Leerdam in Holland, Cornelius Jansenius studied at Utrecht and Louvain, where his teacher was Baius' disciple, Jacques Janson. Jansenius was friends with Duvergier of Hauranne, the future Abbey of Saint-Cyran. He devoted himself passionately to the study of Augustine of Hippone and the theses that he opposed to those of Pelage. After a stay in France, he returned to Louvain; he believed he had discovered in Hippone's philosophy arguments that would properly rehabilitate Baius. It is not easy to disentangle the motives that incited him to confront pontifical thunderbolts and the powerful party of the Jesuits. His affection for Jacques Janson? The hope of shining in the faraway reflection of the pyres? A rigor that corresponded to his taste for asceticism and that incited him to disapprove of the discreet license of the confessors who mixed devotion with the perfume of the boudoir and practiced in theological fashion a psychoanalysis well before there was such a thing?

"The more I advance," Jansenius wrote to Saint-Cyran, "the more the affair frightens me (…). I do not dare to say what I think about predestination and grace out of fear that, when all is said and done, what has happened to the others will happen to me" (he would be condemned).[521]

[520] *Translator's note*: Written by Jean-Baptiste Poquelin Moliere (1622–1673), *Le Tartuffe, or l'imposteur* was banned in 1664 by Louis XIV.

[521] Abbe Pluquet *Memoires pour servir a l'histoire des egarements de l'espirit humain par rapport a la religion chretienne, or Dictionnaire des heresies, des erreurs et des schismes,* Besancon, 1817, II p. 213.

Jansenius had the forethought to die from the plague in Ypres shortly after he sent a letter to Pope Urban VIII that declared he was disposed to approve, improve or retract his statements "according to what would be prescribed by the voice of thunder that comes from the skies of the apostolic See."[522]

His posthumous work, the *Augustinus,* published in 1640, was condemned by Urban VIII two years later.

The Father of Avrigny summarized Jansenius' doctrine in his *Chronological and Dogmatic Memoirs.*

> Since the fall of Adam, pleasure is the unique spring that moves the heart of man; this pleasure is inevitable when it comes and invincible when it has come. If this pleasure is celestial, it brings virtue; if it is terrestrial, it determines vice; and the will finds itself necessarily led by the stronger of the two. These two pleasures, the author says, are like the two plates on a balancing scale; one cannot rise without the other one descending. Thus, man does good or evil, invincibly but voluntarily, according to whether he is dominated by grace or cupidity.[523]

Here is proof — if proof was needed — that the root of all that constituted controversial religious matters resided in the tormented attitudes of individuals when they were confronted by the pleasures of a life that was denied them by virtue of the mandates of heaven and the Spirit, which were the sad abstractions of the earth and the body, respectively.

The Church's obsession was not caused by the scandalous licenses to which pious Jansenius was improbably given access, but by the self-determination that he attributed to man and that — turned towards the most devout asceticism — removed from dogma and the clergy their utility in the government of beings and things.

Jansenism moreover quite rapidly took shape from within a Calvinism transplanted into a society that still had not delegated its powers to free enterprise and the devotion to money sanctified by God.

John Duvergier of Hauranne, the Abbey of Saint-Cyran and a long-time partisan of Baius' ideas, saw his mission in the propagation of the doctrine of his friend Jansenius. His rigor was greatly displeased by the fact that the enjoyment of pleasures chilled by remorse led to the complacency of disenchantment. He won the sympathies of the Arnauld family, especially Pascal and Nicole, who supported the monastery of Port-Royal and erected it as a bastion of Jansenism.

When Saint-Cyran died in 1643, he was succeeded by the "Great Arnauld," who took the lead of the movement, which he treated as if it were a family affair. It is not useless to dwell a little upon this clan, which brandished before the court [of France] and Rome a theological arsenal whose fire-power seemed to result from the discourteous relations that divided the members of a brotherhood that was as holy as it was tormented.

The Arnauld Family

Originally from Herment, in le Puy-de-Dome, Antoine Arnauld (1560–1619) was born to a Protestant father whom Saint Barthelemy convinced to convert to Catholicism. Antoine settled in Paris in 1577 and professed a disdain for the glory of weapons and the conquest for royal favors, which made religion his field of battle. From him came a breed of magistrates and learned men whose Puritan

[522] *Ibid.*

[523] *Ibid.,* p. 214.

rigor, taste for authority, a certain propensity for revolt and a solid sense for business would have turned towards Calvinism if Jansenism had not furnished a better opportunity.

A counselor to Catherine de Medici after he studied at the University of Paris and got a degree in law from Bourges while studying under Cujas, Antoine Arnauld then entered the bar and applied himself with ardor to several polemics against the Jesuits. A Gallician and nationalist, he mocked their "blind obedience to a Spanish General," defended the University of Paris against them and was opposed to their return after Chatel's attack against Henry IV caused them to be banished from France.

Antoine's wife, Catherine Marion (who became a nun at Port-Royal in 1641), gave birth to 20 children, among whom Catherine, Jacqueline-Mary-Angelique, Jeanne-Catherine-Agnes (author of a book called *Letters*), Anne, Mary, and Madeleine would belong to the Abbey, as did Robert and Antoine, the 20th child, who became known as the "Great Arnauld." Henri Arnauld would become the Bishop of Angers, thereby providing his family — always at the frontiers of heresy — with the pledge of his orthodoxy.

The last child of Catherine Marion, the Great Arnauld (born in 1612), was seven years old when his tyrannical and brutal father died; the child was educated by his mother or, more exactly, by the celebrated Abbey of Saint-Cyran, who presided over the destiny of Port-Royal. Yet the world seduced little Antoine; jurisprudence attracted him; he frequented the mansion of Rambouillet; and he was initiated into the literary art of preciousity and imitated Voltaire. But his fate had been decided: he belonged to theology. Enrolled at the Sorbonne in 1633, he studied Augustine under the spiritual direction of Saint-Cyran. The latter, for whom "nothing is as dangerous as knowledge," imposed ordeals on the young man: fasting twice a week, praying and reading the Holy Scriptures on bended knee.

After being ordained a priest, the young man entered Port-Royal one year later (in 1641), resolved to "flee the conversation of the world like poisoned air." One says that he pushed the love of mystery to the point of denouncing as false a thesis that he judged to be too intelligible. *The Frequent Communion* (1643), which was published the year that Saint-Cyran died, brought him to the head of the Jansenist current and aroused the hatred of the Jesuits, who schemed to incarcerate him in the Bastille. During the 25 years that his retreat lasted, the Great Arnauld engaged in polemics against the Jesuits (*New Heresy in Morality, The Moral Practice of the Jesuits*), which furnished Pascal with the material for his *Letters Written to a Provincial.* Returned to grace in 1669, the Great Arnauld became friends with Boileau and Racine, and violently attacked Calvinism, thereby rejoining his brother, Henri, the Bishop of Angers, who applauded the revocation of the Edict of Nantes.

When politics took a hostile turn at Port-Royal, the Great Arnauld fled to Mons, Tournai and Brussels, where he died in 1694. A letter from his friend, the abbey of the Trappist monastery, shows the esteem in which he was held: "At last, Monsieur Arnauld is dead. After pushing his career as far as he could, he had to end it. Whatever else one says, these questions are now closed."[524] To Abbey Bremond, here was "a theological machine-gun in perpetual movement, but completely emptied of interior life."[525] At the time, it was not necessary to perceive that Arnauld's grandeur resulted from an accumulation of pettiness.

A similar social life and an eloquent refusal of the world also animated the life of Robert, called Arnauld of Andilly. His *Memoirs* served his own glory more than that of the God he claimed to venerate: "I have never had an ambition, because I had too many." The supremacy of the absolute nevertheless tallied with the art of intrigue and influence peddling. A madrigal that he offered in the manner of

[524] *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de geographie ecclesiastique,* article "Arnauld."
[525] *Ibid.*

the *Garland of Julie* showed that he wedded devotion to gallantry without too much difficulty. Saint-Cyran made Robert his residual heir on the condition that he retired to Port-Royal. Robert then used all kinds of pretexts to delay the date of his retirement. He schemed at becoming the tutor of the Dauphin; he published *Stanzas on Diverse Christian Truths*; wrote a poem on the life of the Christ; produced his *Letters,* in which he took care to include endorsements from the Jesuits. In vain. The charge that he so coveted escaped him and disappointment pushed him to Port-Royal, where he hastened to send six of his daughters (out of his 15 children). The scandal of his retirement, orchestrated for so long, made him a celebrated person and made Jansenism fashionable.

In 1664, the dispersion of the community caused Robert to go into exile in Pomponne, where one of his sons lived. Having been a odious father, he seemed execrable to his daughter-in-law, who saw him die without displeasure in 1674. He had translated the Augustine's *Confessions,* Saint Theresa's works and Flavius Joseph's *History of the Jews.*

Jacqueline-Mary-Angelique, the daughter of Antoine the Elder (born in 1591), was of a completely different nature. Her brutal frankness broke with the caution of Robert and the Great Arnauld, people who were much closer to Tartuffe than to Moliere's Misanthrope. Intelligent and lively, she preferred marriage to the Abbey, which was imposed on her from the age of seven. "You would like me to be a nun," she said; "I would quite like that, but on the condition that I am an Abbess." At the age of nine, she made her profession of faith, but not without specifying that she "felt free in front of men, and committed to God." Her frenzied calling was always a horror: "I was cursed when men, not God, made me an Abbess and when the monks of the Citeaux consecrated me at the age of 11." From the other side of the window, she was visited by her father and when he, furious, treated her like a parricidal monster, she stated: "My parents made me a nun at the age of nine, when I did not want to be one; today they want me to damn myself by not observing my order."

While one after another of her sisters entered Port-Royal, she became fervent as if overcome by a somber and desperate ecstasy. Named Abbess in 1642, she wedded the cause of Jansenism, and did not hesitate to treat Pope Innocent X as a deceiver when the five propositions of *Augustinus* were condemned in 1653. God was the weapon of her vengeance against the men who banned her from the world. This passionate woman, whose intelligence and sadly constrained sensuality merited a destiny better suited to her hopes, died in 1661, while Pope Alexander promulgated new condemnations in a formulary that the clergy had to sign.

* * *

Motivated more by hatred of the Jesuits than by religious conviction, a popular current flattered the Jansenists. It applauded their rebellion against Rome and their insolence in the face of a monarch who was as vain as he was petty, and whose military defeats undermined the people's infatuation.

Reduced to silence by the threat of corporeal punishment decreed by Louis XIV, the Jansenists went to Holland, where they poured out lampoons. A Jansenist Church founded in the Netherlands continued to exist until the Nineteenth Century. In France, where the fight was pursued by Pasquier Quesnel, the condemnation of its propositions in 1713 by the Papal Bull *Unigenitus* confirmed the end of a movement that passed away less on its own than due to the decline of theology, that is, the language of God.

Stripped of its celestial arguments, the rigor of morality revealed the effects of repression through the manifestations of hysteria that justified neither religious homilies nor political speeches. The burial of Deacon Paris (a model of Jansenist fervor) in the cemetery at Saint-Medard in Paris brought about

grave-side convulsive outbursts and miraculous recoveries that exhilarated the Parisians. An edict prohibiting convulsionist assemblies was eventually replaced by the following celebrated inscription: "In the name of the King, make no miracles at this place." In 1787, Bonjour — the parish-priest of Fareins, near Trevoux, who continued the tradition of the convulsionists — crucified his mistress on the cross of his church in the hope of producing new miraculous recoveries.

From the Great Arnauld to Bonjour, Jansenism fulfilled the destiny that modernity reserved for the heresies: to become sects at the same time that the Church and the thunderbolts that Jansenius ingenuously brought forth from the Holy See entered into the ideological spectacle, where — subverted by the great apparatus of the State and its rape of consciences — they dragged an existence that was more and more marginal to the point of no longer appearing underneath the cover of the folkloric rites that concerned birth, marriage and death, and (secondarily) jaunts on Sundays.

Chapter 47: Pietists, Visionaries and Quietists

The Pietists

Born from the preaching of the Lutherian pastor Philippe-Jacob Spener (1635–1705), Pietism proceeded from the tradition of Johannes Denck, for whom faith — or its absence, because only private conviction was important — did not bother with sacraments, priests or pastors, nor even with the allegedly sacred texts.

Under German and English Pietism, there also smoldered the thought of Jacob Boehme (1575–1624), the shoemaker from Gorlitz (in Silesia), whose doctrine was part of the Hermetic tradition and the subtle alchemy of individual experience.

Without entering into an analysis of a rich and dense conception, it is possible to emphasize the point at which Pietism's God, dissolved into nature, more perfectly annihilated the idea of God than atheism, which was content to reduce God to a social function presented everywhere in the exercise of power and authority as an abstract government of beings and things. If, for Boehme, the signs of the divine still wore the patched and cheap finery of theology (Christ, Trinity, grace), they were no less surely distributed as signs of a life identified — as in the thought of Marguerite Porete and Simon of Samaria — with an eternal flux in which the "amorous" conjunction created the beings and things that mankind created in its turn.

The universe manifested itself at every instant in the indissociable coupling of material energy and energetic matter, in the desire that rejoiced in the androgyny of interlaced lovers and the *mysterium magnum* of pleasure and creation.

The radical wing of Pietism expressed, most often through the vehicles of visions, revelations and apocalypses, the feeling of a diffuse sexuality in search of an experience in which the unity of the individual and the world was accomplished.

It happens that the vehicle of the visions threw the illuminated one into the play of political influences in which his or her claims to rule the future attracted the reprobation of the authorities, if not worse.

Jean-Albert Adelgreiff had a sad experience. The seven angels who mandated him to reform the conduct of the rulers did not prevent him from being burned at Koenigsberg in 1636. Czar Peter, called Peter the Great, proceeded in the same manner against the unfortunate Quirinus Kuhlmann, condemned to the pyre in Moscow in 1689.

The theosophical alchemist Paul Felgenhauer spent a large part of his life in prison or wandering Europe due to successive banishments. His *Dawn of Wisdom,* in which was figured the Aurora and the Sophia dear to Boehme, fixed sometime in the [Seventeenth] century the beginning of the millennium that had not made an exact appointment. With the same probable certitude, Paul Nagel foresaw the collapse of the papacy in March 1623.

Others, such as Elie Eller (1690–1750), assured prophetic determinations in matters of destiny with more cleverness. Eller, while looking for work in Elberfeld, seduced a rich widow with whom he founded one of the Pietist communities in which exaltation and prayer propelled faith in the divine

presence well beyond the domes of the temples and the other places "sullied by papist or Calvinist [*parpaillots*] hypocrites."

Anna von Buchel, the daughter of a baker, plunged her adepts into ecstasy due to luxuriant visions in which she dialogued with Jesus-Christ in a very intimate fashion. Since Elie Eller occupied the carnal place of Jesus in her heart, the husband took offense and, accusing Anna von Buchel of mystification, drew down upon himself the [counter-]accusation of making sacrifices to Satan. Eller got him locked up as a lunatic and married the prophetess, whose revelations he recorded in a work entitled *Hirtentasche* (*The Shepherd's Sack*).

Figured as the Mother and Father of Sion, the couple undertook to make Jesus reborn in the womb of Anna. He first appeared in the untimely form of a girl. A second child, male this time, soon thereafter died, not caring about his triumphs to come. Anna succumbed in her turn.

Elie Eller entered into a third marriage. His adepts were numerous in Remsdorff, where he was named mayor. He thoughtfully died in 1750, without anyone knowing if he lived in harmony with his desires or only in a cunning calculation of holiness, honorability and libertinage.

Johann-Willem Petersen (1649–1727) was inspired by Jacob Boehme and Valentin Weigel, and provided his pious communities with the effervescence of millenarianist preaching and the exaltation of visions that catechized the crowds. His religious ardor sometimes took on the colors of a mystical sensuality.

> Assuredly, the Spirit of prophecy was not partial to anyone. Here were a swarm of clairvoyants who fluttered around the leaders of the sect: Madeleine Elrich, Christine-Regina Bader, Adelaide Schwartz and Anne-Marguerite Jahn As in a well-regulated troupe, each one had his or her role: Anna-Maria was the 'Pietist singer.' Anne-Eve Jacob was 'the sucker of blood.' There were other stars who, naturally, had more important roles. Jean-Guillaume Petersen had the privilege of having divine illuminations and also had the advantage of being married to a woman, Eleonore of Merlau, who also had visions. She composed works that the celebrated Pietist published under his name. Guillaume Postel also had some influence on Petersen's thought. Petersen also referred to a book by an English countess, whose name he did not mention, and who composed *De principiis philosophiae antiquissimae et recentissimae,* a work that is not without depth and which was inspired by Jewish Kabbalah.
>
> According to Petersen, when the reign of a thousand years had established itself in heaven and on earth, the Jews would convert and, returning to Palestine, they would reestablish their ancient kingdom. Petersen refrained from setting the date of the second coming of Jesus-Christ. Moreover, one observes that the 'end of this age did not designate a universal conflagration, but the 'end of the current age.' Contrary to a certain tradition, the woman of the Revelations who would give birth (ch. 12) was the Jewish nation; it would give birth to the Christ despite the efforts of the infernal Dragon, the monster that would be put down by Saint Michael, the protecting angel of Israel. Rosemonde-Julienne von Assburg was one of the ballet dancers [*coryphees*] of the troupe of Pietist Sibyls. Leibniz judged her visions to be quite respectable, no less than those of Saint Hildegarde, Saint Brigitte, Saint Melchtilde and other holy ladies. This same Leibniz was the editor of several of Petersen's works. The influence of Madame Petersen was considerable in Germany and England.[526]

[526]P. Vuilliaud, "Fin du monde et prophetes modernes," *Les Cahiers d'Hermes,* Paris, #2, 1947, p. 112.

For Johann Georg Gichtel and Eva von Buttlar, the Sophia of Boehme and the ancient Gnostics was illustrated by the two figures (less antithetical than they might appear at first) of the future Eve and the current Eve, the femininity of a faraway princess and the nearby femininity of tumultuous sensuality (but this was also the case with certain exalted, Pietist "suckers of blood" and the *pneuma* that was identical with *sperma*).

In his study of *The English Disciples of Jacob Boehme,* Serge Hutin devoted several pages to Gichtel:

> Johann-Georg Gichtel (1638–1710), the son of a counselor to the court of Ratisbonne, had shown mystical tendencies since his childhood. As an adolescent, he wanted, in imitation of the Christ, 'to annihilate' his carnal self: renouncing all pleasure, he vowed perpetual virginity. A Lutherian, he was rapidly disappointed by the dryness of official Protestantism and turned towards the Catholic religion, which did not delay in also disappointing him. This young man, more and more sinking himself into a solitary and exalted devotion, became impassioned with studying and spent entire nights immersed in Greek, the sacred Eastern languages and theology. After successfully enrolling in the College of Theology at the University of Strasbourg, he nevertheless had to give in to his tutors, who obliged him to follow his father and become a magistrate: willy-nilly he became a lawyer at the imperial High Court of Spire. But this important function did not monopolize his attention for long: fleeing from pressing feminine solicitations, Gichtel returned to his native town in great haste. Enrolled in the bar at Ratisbonne, he happened — while at a library — to meet Baron Justinian Ernst von Weltz; the two men became close friends on the spot. Weltz (1621–1668) was a rich Illuminati who wanted to found a missionary society, the *Christerbauliche Jesusgesellschaft* [the Christian Edification Society of Jesus], the objectives of which would be the realization of Christian unity and the conversion of the entire world to the Gospel; he associated himself with Gichtel and together they submitted their project to the Evangelical Assembly of the Lutherian Church: at first the Assembly welcomed the proposal and the Baron deposited in a bank in Nuremberg the sum — enormous for the times — of 30,000 *riksdallers.* But the theologians, upon becoming aware of the chimerical and nebulous character of the project, quite quickly manifested their disagreement. To disencumber themselves from the two associates, who began to create a scandal in the Rhineland, the apostolic delegate from Mayence proposed to them that they go convert the Indians of South America; Weltz and Gichtel went to Holland, but refused to get on the boat at the last minute.
>
> Having left the Baron, and returned to Ratisbonne, Gichtel was then, after fervent prayers, the object of an illumination that put him into direct contact with the Divinity: submitting himself in advance to all the ordeals that the Christ had him undergo, he completely abandoned himself to the superior 'Will' that had 'annihilated' his own will. Losing all prudence, he publicly denied the necessity of outward religion, in which he now saw a redoubtable obstacle to the inward communication of the soul with God; and, still more maladroitly, he violently expelled the pastors from the town. The pastors had him brought before the tribunals as 'seditious,' an 'enthusiast' and 'anabaptist.' At first imprisoned in Nuremberg, Gichtel then languished for three weeks in a somber dungeon in Ratisbonne. Condemned for 'anti-social heresy,' he was excommunicated, excluded from the sacraments and all the ceremonies of the Lutherian Church, and was even sentenced to be executed; after the intervention of the magistrate of the city, his death sentence was com-

muted into perpetual banishment: deprived of his position, his goods and his status as a citizen, the visionary was chased from Ratisbonne (February 1655).

At first Gichtel wandered through southern Germany, where charitable people provisionally housed him. Then he went to Vienna, where he had influential relatives, and obtained a position at the imperial court, at which he was assailed with many worldly temptations (riches, honors ...); seeing how he was favored in the capital, his persecutors in Ratisbonne became afraid and restored his fortune to him. But Gichtel, having made the irrevocable resolution to renounce all the goods of this world, vowed extreme poverty: he gave his money to his oldest sister (who quickly squandered it), abandoned his official functions, gave up his luxurious clothing for a coarse frock made of leather and left on foot for Holland.

After being detained in Zwolle by the Lutherian authorities, who suspected him of being an Anabaptist, Gichtel established himself in Amsterdam, where from then on he was forced to live on the subsidies of diverse protectors — he had been expressly prohibited from expressing his religious convictions in any way.

In 1669, he became "the spiritual husband of the Virgin Sophia": she manifested herself to him, became his "wife," revealed to him the last explication of all things and enjoined him to institute the "priesthood of Melchisedeq," to found the "New Church," the Church of the Last Dispensation; all books had to be rejected, with the exceptions of the Bible — interpreted theosophically — and the works of Jacob Boehme. After this great "illumination," Gichtel united around him a small group of disciples who desired to live — according to his own example and the model of the Christ — a life of perfect purity: this was the community of the *Brothers of the Angelic Life,* a small sect that still subsists secretly in Germany.

According to Gichtel, the Reformation destroyed Catholicism without substituting anything better in its place, and so a *veritable Reformation* would have to be instituted: this Reformation would have to consist in putting into practice the theosophy of Jacob Boehme. (...)

The put this new dispensation into practice, Gichtel instaurated the "priesthood of Melchisedeq," a community of "saints," of "Brothers of the Angelic Life," of "soldiers of the Christ." These brothers and sisters — because women would be admitted into the community, with rights equal to those of the men — had to strive to return to the state of *angelic perfection,* lost by Adam during the Fall; it would thus be possible for them to regain the primitive androgyny of man: ' ... in heaven, there is neither man nor woman.'

'The Christ,' Gichtel said, 'has taught us that if we want to be his *disciples,* we must renounce all terrestrial desires, choose and follow that choice: and this instauration is addressed, not only to the apostles, but to all Christians. The first Christians *practiced* this commandment and thus testified that they loved the Christ and that they upheld His law.'[527]

In the consecration of Melchisedeq, Gichtel's frenzied asceticism rediscovered the Essenism that had been the original, true Christianity:

[527] S. Hutin, *Les Disciples anglais de Jacob Boehme,* Paris, 1960, pp. 16–19.

> In the same way that the priests of the Old Testament, to celebrate their religion, had to keep themselves pure, holy, immaculate and chaste — so that the Anger of God was not aroused by them, and so that they could stand before God in the Sanctuary — the priesthood of Melchisedeq of the New Alliance demanded it even more, because completely divine service required a complete renunciation of all terrestrial love.[528]

Unlike the Stylites and the Anachoretes, whose repression of sexuality was allied with a hatred of the self, which they called the absolute evil of Satan, Gichtel extracted from his libidinal energy — transmuted into mystical visions — not the horrors of diabolical temptation, but a kind of ravishing succubus, which was nothing other than the Sophia of the Gnostics and Boehme. Gichtel himself recounted the flashes of his ethereal orgasms:

> I see in my heart a white light, around my heart a large serpent, twisted three times upon itself like a tress; in the middle, in clarity, the Christ appeared in the form described by John (*Revelations,* 1, 13, 14, 15).
>
> When the soul has walked for some time with its Beloved in the garden of roses, when it has provided flowers, the Fiance takes the soul completely beyond the body. It then appears like a ball of fire (...) it is plunged into a sea of fire: this happened to me five times over the course of five consecutive days, during my evening prayers; I saw that it was in a pool of a crystalline blue, like the firmament, but it was an igneous water that the soul, by crossing it, made choppy with little waves of fire; I cannot express the delicious taste and impression.
>
> (...) After a black cloud appeared, a white one followed and out of it came the noble, celestial Virgin Sophia of Jesus (...), his loyal companion and friend, whom he (Gichtel) had loved until then without knowing her. And she appeared to him in his spirit, face to face; God had thus sent (...) his eternal Word [*Verbe*] Jesus in a virginal form, to serve him (Gichtel) as consort and wife... O how lovingly she embraced his soul! No woman could frolic more affectionately with her husband than Sophia did with his soul. And what he experienced in the course of such a union he would equally desire that other souls enjoy, because words cannot express the inexpressible sweetness, even if it were permitted...[529]

In his correspondence with Colonel Kirchberger, Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin evoked the love of Gichtel and his Sophia:

> 'Sophia, his beloved, his divine Sophia, whom he loved and whom he had never seen, made her first visit on Christmas Day, 1673; he saw and understood in the third rule this virgin who was dazzling and celestial. In this interview, she accepted him as husband and the wedding was consummated with ineffable delights.' Married to Sophia, who 'made him hope for spiritual progeniture,' lived with her 'in the luminous inward depths,' Gichtel engaged in daily conversations with her: 'Sophia also possessed a fundamental language, without outward words and without vibrations of air, and which did not resemble any human language; nevertheless, he understood it as easily as his mother tongue.'[530] Through

[528] *Ibid.,* p. 21.
[529] *Ibid.*
[530] L.-Cl. de Saint-Martin, *Correspondance ineditie,* Paris, 1862.

revelations concerning the soul and nature, she directed him to publish the works of Jacob Boehme.

Raadt, a scholar associated with Gichtel, fell in love with Sophia and imposed on himself the 'spiritual circumcision' so as to merit seeing this entity. 'She will let fall several rays of her image on the terrestrial qualities of their souls.' Around Gichtel was soon formed the Society of the Thirty, all lovers of Sophia and beneficiaries of her favors, which caused him to remark 'how much the astral spirit desires enjoying the nuptial bed of Sophia.' Dissent appeared among the Thirty in 1682, but a young wholesaler from Frankfurt named Ueberfeld, who later published Gichtel's letters, went to find him and decided to remain as a disciple. 'Upon his arrival, Sophia manifested herself in the third rule to the two friends in the most glorious way.' Ueberfeld took Sophia as his wife and 'he was elevated to the most sublime heights.'

One confirmed that Sophia, the immaterial wife, was polygamous, sharing herself among all her chosen ones, on the condition that they were initiated: 'No soul, even a good one, can possess Sophia.' She could even be the celestial spouse of a woman, since the first vision that the English mystic, Jane Leade, had was one in which Sophia manifested herself physically. Saint-Martin said of the wedding of Gichtel and Sophia: 'Everything in it had the seal of truth. If we were close to each other, I would also have a story of marriage to relate to you, one in which the same step was taken by me, although in another form.'[531]

At the same time in France, Montfaucon of Villars — in his *Count of Gabalis,* published in 1670 — approached *cum grano salis* the problem of libertine relations with beings issued more from the mysteries of nature than from the heavens: "The most beautiful (of women) is horrible next to the least sylphide." The air, fire and earth were full of superb creatures whose uselessness assures them of favor. "They only require of men that they abstain from women whose faults they cannot suffer (and) permit us to love them as much as it pleases us."

In *The Amorous Devil* (1772), and in the same gallant manner, Jacques Cazotte would treat ideas already in fashion among the Gnostics and Alexandrine Hermeticists, and that the Byzantine monk Michael Psellos had expounded in the Eleventh Century in his *Peri energeias daimonon.*

While Gichtel appeased the excesses of a repressed sexuality in esoteric couplings, other Pietists married the heavens to the earth in less disincarnated, if not less spiritual weddings.

In Germany, colleges of piety multiplied; these were congregations in which religious hysteria made use of an audience ready to unhinge itself unreservedly. Such assemblies survived in great numbers in the churches and sects of the United States, where television successfully exhibited the neurotic troubles of ecstasy.

Created by Eva von Buttlar, the Christian and Philadelphian Society ascribed to the Sophia of Boehme and Gichtel the traits of a terrestrial and generous sensuality. Eva von Buttlar herself had wed a French refugee, a dance professor at Eisenbach. She left him to throw herself into Pietism. Having founded an association in which piety excited her passionate nature, she was recognized as the Sophia, at once the New Eve and a reincarnation of the Holy-Spirit. The heavens, over which she ruled, provided her with two lovers. She named one God the Father and the other God the Son. She believed that marriage was a sin and preached the holiness of love freely lived. The Lutherians obtained from

[531] Alexandrian, *Histoire de la philosophie occulte,* pp. 366 and 367.

the police the information that the name of this order was Paradise, in which Eva von Buttlar and her adepts practiced the teachings of God according to [Charles] Fourier well before he began imparting them.

The counts of Wittgenstein opened their domains to all those whose beliefs condemned them to persecution. Eva took refuge there, but her crime appeared inexpiable. Sophia and "God the Father," condemned to death, managed to escape from the authorities and no doubt consoled themselves about their paradise lost in prudent clandestinity.

At the beginning of the Eighteenth Century, Pietism evolved towards *Aufklarung* [enlightenment]. Two workers, the Kohler brothers, mixed apocalyptic diatribes together with the first accents of a proletarian insurrection that they announced for Christmas Day 1748. One was executed, the other imprisoned. They prefigured [Wilhelm] Weitling, a contemporary of the young Marx who mocked his archaisms. He proposed a general insurrection of the proletariat whose iron lance — constituted by criminals released from prison and transformed [*transcendes*] by their divine mission — would introduce into the cadaver of the old world the ferment of the egalitarian millennium. It was not assured that such a beautiful project would involve more fatal results than the quite rational programme of the Communist parties.

A wandering preacher who was persecuted everywhere, Ernst Christoph Hochmann von Hochenau (1670–1721) would also find among the counts of Wittgenstein an asylum from which he led the fight for tolerance and the abolition of the death penalty.

A radical Pietist, Gottfried Arnold was the first to approach the history of the Church and the [various] heresies in a spirit that was disengaged from theological prejudices, if not religious prejudices as well. For him, the sincerity of conviction took precedence over doctrine, and nothing was condemnable among the diversity of opinions and practices if they did not aim to harm life or the dignity of individuals. The human meaning that slowly revoked the celestial obedience of the religions could not be better expressed than Holderlin did: his Diotima was the sensual and amorous Sophia, and she exorcised the pangs of a Pietist education by attributing to the marvelous designs of childhood the poetic source that creates and re-creates the world.

The Quietists

The Church of Rome reserved for the monastic communities the exercise of contemplation and the privilege of assuring a direct transmission between humanity and God through prayer. The course of the world was thus pursued under the stick of the spiritual and temporal powers without the ardors of faith inopportunely claiming to displace the institutional mountain tops.

The people did not happily nourish these congregations of loafers who converted the care they took over souls into chores, taxes and tithes. The people later demonstrated their displeasure by joyously sacking the abbeys and monasteries.

By expelling the monastic orders, the Reformation gave acceptability to those who desired to offer themselves the luxury of dialoguing with God without being preoccupied with the power of their terrestrial subsistence.

The form of visionary Pietism known in the Catholic countries under the name of Quietism aroused the reprobation of Rome and the public powers in the Seventeenth Century.

An inhabitant of Lille, Antoinette Bourignon (1616–1680) was overtaken by an extreme devotion at an early age, but it entailed a strictly Catholic obedience. A sudden illumination persuaded her to confer the light of divine inspiration upon the world.

In the name of the powerful movements of the soul, she condemned the outward forms of religious organization. Kolakowski noted her "repulsion for her mother, which appeared in her childhood, and later her hatred for women and obsessional fear of sexual matters."[532]

Bourignon's speculations on original androgyny did not lack piquant aspects:

> He had in his womb a vessel in which small eggs were born and another vessels full of a liquor that made these eggs fecund. And when the man became excited by the love of his God, the desire that he had for other creatures to praise, love and adore this great majesty sprinkled — through the fire of the love of God — these eggs with inconceivable delights; and one of these eggs, made fecund, then exited the man through the canal in the form of an egg and, shortly thereafter, from this egg there hatched out a perfect man. Thus it will be that, in the eternal life, there will be a holy and endless generation, quite different from the one that sin introduced by means of women, [a holy generation] by which God will form people — in conformity with the new discoveries of anatomy — by drawing from the flanks of Adam the viscera that contain the eggs that women possess and from which people are still born.[533]

Serge Hutin comments:

> The matrix of original androgyny was torn from Adam during the bipartition, which resulted from the Fall.
>
> These considerations [of Bourignon] were tied to a very original Christology: the Word [*Verbe*] was engendered by Adam when he was in the hermaphroditic state of innocence. The work of Jesus in his terrestrial incarnation was to teach mankind the means by which it could recover the favor of God and return to its perfect condition before the Fall.
>
> To be saved, one must completely detach oneself from terrestrial things and become aware of the fact that they have disappeared and that God alone remains, the being having been annihilated in Him; the only qualification required for teaching the Truth is thus the perfect union of the soul with God.
>
> Antoinette Bourignon thus described the birth, after the end of this world, of the *New Jerusalem,* the celestial dwelling of the just; and she showed how, after the [Last] Judgment, the earth will be transformed into an infernal prison in which the individual wills of the damned will be given over to a merciless struggle; but divine mercy will finally triumph and deliver the damned.[534]

Traveling the world [of Europe] so as to propagate her vision of an inward and purely spiritualized reality, Antoinette Bourignon had the chance to escape the fate of her friend Quirinus Kuhlmann (1651–1680) and her contemporary, Simon Morin (1623–1663).

[532] Kolakowski, quoted by J.N. Vuarnet, *Extases feminines,* Paris, 1991.
[533] Quoted by S. Hutin, *op. cit.,* pp. 27 and 28.
[534] *Ibid.,* p. 28.

A visionary and the [self-avowed] reincarnation of the Messiah, Simon Morin had the misfortune of living under the rule of a devout king, to whom he was denounced by a mediocre writer named Desmarets of Saint-Sorlin. The latter feigned placing himself among the ranks of Morin's proselytes, obtained from him an exposition of his chiliastic doctrine and delivered it to the authorities. Louis XIV had him burned along with his writings in 1663. In 1647, Morin published his *Thoughts of Simon Morin.*

As for Quirinus Kuhlmann, Vuilliaud summarized his destiny in a few words: "The pyre was his throne."[535]

At the age of 18 and at the end of a serious illness, Kuhlmann had a vision of God, who invested him with the mission of revealing his message to all the nations. Kuhlmann then left Breslau, his native town, and traveled through Germany and Holland, where he became enthusiastic about the works of Jacob Boehme.

According to Serge Hutin,

> in Amsterdam, Kuhlmann came to know another young visionary, Johann Rothe, who was as exalted as he was; both joined the community of the 'Angelic Brothers,' but, quickly coming into conflict with Gichtel, they founded their own society.
>
> After Rothe's arrest, Kuhlmann led the life of a wanderer according to his prophetic 'inspirations.' In 1675, he went to Luebeck; he wanted to go to Rome to dethrone the pope, but finally embarked for Smyrna, where he proclaimed the imminence of the definitive Reformation. Persuaded that he would be its craftsman, and that the 'spiritual kingdom' would at first be instaurated in the East, he went to Constantinople, where he tried in vain — through the intermediary of the Dutch ambassador — to obtain an audience with the great vizier (1678). He then went to Switzerland, England (he visited London in 1679, and translated his books into English), France (he was in Paris in 1681) and Germany.
>
> Finally, he left for Russia with the goal of instaurating the 'Kingdom of God' there; he took two wives, frequented the strangest Russian sects and attempted to convert the Muscovites to his mission. Peter the Great had him imprisoned as a dangerous heretic and conspirator; on 4 October 1689, Kuhlmann and his friend Conrad Nordermann were burned alive in Moscow.[536]

In a certain way, Peter Poiret (1646–1719) can be situated at the hinge between the first and second generations of Quietism. Born in Metz, he was a Calvinist minister in Heidelberg and Deux-Ponts. His reading of texts by Tauler, Thomas-A-Kempis and especially Antoinette Bourignon converted him to Quietism, which reduced existence to the pure contemplation of an inward God and the ecstasies of the unfathomed soul. Chased from the Palatinate by the war, he took refuge in Amsterdam, then went to Hamburg to meet Antoinette Bourignon, and spent eight years there studying the mystics. Persecuted by the Lutherians, he went to a place near Leyden in Holland, where he died in 1719. He published the works of Antoinette Bourignon and the works of Jeanne-Marie Bouvier de La Motte, better known as Madame Guyon, who gave Quietism its letters of nobility.

[535] P. Vulliaud, *op. cit.,* p. 114.
[536] S. Hutin, *op. cit.,* p. 25.

Madame Guyon

In 1675, the Spanish priest Miguel de Molinos (1628–1696) published *A Spiritual Guide Intended to Led the Soul to Perfect Contemplation and the Rich Treasury of the Peace of the Heart.* Well received by the Catholic milieus, the book was suddenly condemned as Quietist and, in 1679, Pope Innocent XI pushed cruelty as far as throwing its author into the prisons of the Divine Office, where he eventually died. The crime committed by the unfortunate Molinos was simply having revived the memory of the *Alumbrados* of the Sixteenth Century by assimilating them into a great spirituality. Molinos undertook to maintain the soul and the body in an absolute inaction so as to let God express himself in each person without the obstacles of conscience and [moral] imperatives. Molinos excluded the idea that the faithful should break with the observance of religious duties, but he conferred so many privileges upon the annihilation of the soul in ecstasy that the Church, the sacraments and works of piety were greatly de-emphasized.

Molinos' principal accuser, the Bishop of Naples, claimed that the people who authorized divine quests did so to revoke his [personal] authority and to follow their inclinations freely. And no doubt this was not pure calumny, since the satisfactions of nature excelled at displaying the very reasons for combating them.

Molinos' doctrine found echoes in France, where Jeanne-Marie Bouvier de La Motte, the widow of a certain Guyon, recommended the annihilation of the soul to the point that all prayer disappeared, except for the rebuke: "Thy will be done!"

Violently attacked by Bossuet, Madame Guyon obtained the protection of Fenelon, the Bishop of Cambrai. Condemned to prison, then exile, she did not repudiate any of her opinions. Accused by Pope Innocent XII, Fenelon abjured.

No more than the "Guerinets," or adepts of the parish-priest Guerin, of whom Racine spoke in his *Summary of the History of Port-Royal* [1747] (*) neither Madame Guyon nor Fenelon used the illumination acquired by prayer to take Jesuitical liberties with asceticism. But it is probable that the simple people made more handy use of the divine graces and ecstasies so common in love. The songs that lampooned the Quietists were in circulation at the time. One of the refrains related the miraculous effects of devotion:

> As for my body, I abandon it to you,
> My soul being my only care.
> When the soul gives itself to God
> One can leave one's body to one's friend.

It is true that, at the time, the virtuous Bossuet, in a cassock, practiced the charming peril and disgraces of love with Mademoiselle Mauleon. In a society that was choked by the devout party and the prudishness of a pitiful monarchy, it was necessary that the pleasures of the senses were exalted in the shadow of the confessional, since it was dangerous to rally to the joyous revolt of the libertines such as Saint-Pavin, Blot, Claude the Small and Cyrano de Bergerac.

(*) "This was when two famous nuns from Montdidier were introduced to Maubuisson by one of the visitors, to teach, he said, the secrets of the most sublime prayers. The Mother of the Angels and the Angelic Mother were not close enough to the will of the fathers, and they often reproached them for knowing no other perfection than that which was acquired by the mortification of the senses and

the practice of good works. The Mother of the Angels, who had learned at Port-Royal to mistrust novelty, observed these two young women closely; and it happened that, in the jargon of pure love, annihilation and perfect nudity, they excused all of the illusions and horrors that the Church had condemned in Molinos. These women were indeed from the sect of the illuminati from Roye, whom one calls the *Guerinets,* for whom Cardinal Richelieu had made such a careful search. Since the Mother of the Angels gave notice of the peril that the monastery was in, these two nuns were confined very strictly by order of the court; and the visitor who protected them was forced to withdraw."

Chapter 48: The End of the Divine Right

In the profusion of its diverse tendencies, the triumph of Protestantism — in which the economic mechanisms that chaotically governed historical evolution burst the skin of the God that had clothed them in his myth — put an end to the notion of repressive orthodoxy and, consequently, the existence of "heresy."

The sects gave the [Greek] word *hairesis* the neutral meanings of "choice" and "option." They entered into the currents of opinions that soon claimed, with Destutt of Tracy and Benjamin Constant, the name "ideologies." The decapitation of Louis XVI, monarch of divine right, removed from God the ecclesiastical head at which — like a monstrous cephalopod — were articulated the secular arms that were tasked with imposing his writs of mandamus.

The jubilation that, around the end of the [Eighteenth] century, brought down the churches and monasteries began to express itself openly in the works in which the derision of sacred things showed quite well that religion merited the impertinent pikes of quips more than the thrusts of philosophical reason. The execution of the Knight of La Barre recalled that the Church was still capable of biting cruelly, but this was the last crime prescribed by the obedience of civil law to religious power.

Nevertheless, if Diderot, due to his insolence, only received a short period of imprisonment, the anti-religious thinkers of the beginning of the Eighteenth Century still had the most lively interest in being vigilant and dissimulative.

The case of the parish priest Jean Meslier is too well-known to be discussed at length here.[537] We recall that this parish priest of Etrepigny lived — with the exceptions of a disagreement with the lord of the town and a forbidden love affair with his servant — the life of a man fulfilling the duties of his position. His *Testament,* discovered after his death, eradicated God from society and the universe by extirpating him along with hierarchicalized power and the principle of the exploitation of man by man, which were the foundations of God's fantastical existence. The text, mutilated by Voltaire, was only distributed in its unabridged version later on, but the celebrity of Meslier himself arrived well ahead of the publication of his work, thanks to the celebrated formula: "Humanity will only be happy when the last priest has been hanged with the guts of the last prince."[538]

[537] *Translator's note*: an otherwise unremarkable Catholic priest (1664–1733) who wrote a massive book called *Common Sense* (also known as *Meslier's Testament*), which promoted atheism and was only discovered after his death. Voltaire edited and wrote a preface to its second edition.

[538] *Translator's note*: Others have rendered this formula as *Je voudrais, et ce sera le dernier et le plus ardent de mes souhaits, je voudrais que le dernier des rois fut etrangle avec les boyaux du dernier pretre*: "I would like, and this would be the last and most ardent of my wishes, I would like it that the last king was strangled with the guts of the last priest." It appears that, in any case, the remark does not appear in the text of the *Testament* itself, but in one of the many abstracts of it that circulated during the French Revolution. On 17 May 1968, Vaneigem and the other members of the Situationist International who, among many others, occupied the Sorbonne, sent out telegrams that included the declaration: "Humanity won't be happy until the last capitalist is hung with the guts of the last bureaucrat," or, depending on the intended recipient, "… until the last bureaucrat is hung with the guts of the last capitalist."

Thomas Woolston

The humorous irreverence and misfortune of Thomas Woolston proceeded from a misunderstanding. Even if it is fitting to not underestimate its corrosive humor, his *Discourse on the Miracles of Jesus-Christ* obeyed a desire to demonstrate at what points the Scriptures had only allegorical meaning. Such was already the opinion of Origen, Denck and Weigel; today it is the sentiment of the theologians who are dismayed by the common derision that confronts the religions of present-day [commodity] consumption.

Born in 1669 in Northamp, and later a student at Cambridge, Woolston acquired the reputation as an erudite and punctilious man of the Church. His Latin dissertation on a letter from Pontius Pilate to Tiberius on the subject of Jesus put into doubt a fabricated document, as many such documents were, with the sole goal of authenticating the historical Jesus.

Another one of his works expounded his thesis on the necessity of allegorical interpretations of texts claimed to be sacred. Intervening in the quarrel between Collins and the theologians concerning the foundations of Christianity, he wrote his ironic work, *Moderator between a Nonbeliever and an Apostate.*

Published in 1727, his *Discourse on the Miracles of Jesus-Christ* completed the quarrel with his friends and exposed him to the persecutions of all the religious spirits, conformist or not. Condemned to a year in prison and to a fine that he could not pay, he aroused the democratic sentiments of many of his fellow citizens. Samuel Clarke solicited his release in the name of the freedom of thought claimed by England. The authorities consented, on the condition that Woolston refrained from publishing anything shocking. He refused to exchange a repudiation for freedom, which he estimated to be the spring of natural rights and died on 27 January 1733, saying, "Here is a battle that all men are forced to fight and that I fight, not only with patience but also willingly."

He addressed an acerbic dedication to the Bishop of London, his prosecutor; it rendered homage to him "with as much justice as you are due, because of the prosecution that you have wisely brought against the *Moderator,* as against a nonbeliever who here renders to you very humble thanks, and who declares himself to be an admirer of your zeal, wisdom and conduct."

His *Discourse* ridiculed the Scriptures. He was astonished that Jesus-Christ had permitted demons to enter into a herd of pigs and cause destruction. "Where was the goodness and justice of such an action?" With respect to the recovery of a woman who lost some blood, he remarked: "If one reported to you that the Pope had cured a loss of blood similar to that of the woman in the Gospels, what could Protestants say, if not that a stupid, credulous and superstitious woman attacked by some slight illness had imagined herself to have been cured and that an impostor pontiff, helped by people so rascally that, to bring him the veneration of the populace, they had spread the rumor that such a recovery was a great miracle?"

He added: "I am charmed that it is not said in the Gospels that he [Jesus] had taken money from these brave people, for having exercised his trade as a fortune teller; had this happened, our doctors would not have failed to found upon such an example a right to demand taxes, salaries and pensions as payment for their divinations."

Woolston mocked the curse hurled by Jesus against a fig tree that dried up one night without taking into account the interests of the thus-injured owner. He mocked the resurrection and the fact that Jesus appealed to Lazarus in a loud voice, "as if Lazarus was so deaf that he must have been a dead man." Like Jacques Gruet, Thomas Scoto and Hermann of Rijswick, Woolston characterized the Savior "as impostor full of deceit."

Woolston's caustic spirit did not attack the authority that the Constantinian Church invested in the mythical Jesus-Christ without also aiming at all the truths that were so quick to send to the pyre or prison those who did not kneel down before them. Woolston defended the memory of Servetus against Calvin. His refusal of a freedom purchased at the price of an enslavement to received ideas rested upon a model of dignity struggling for a tolerance in which many were content, like Voltaire, to raise their voices when the danger had passed and their glory was not in peril.

Woolston's spirit, disencumbered from the scruples of faith in the Church, sharpened itself upon Holbach's *Portable Theology* and especially upon the works composed by the Abbey Henri-Joseph du Laurens (1719–1797), whose *Matthew the Accomplice, or the Diversity of the Human Spirit* was among the funniest texts that ridiculed religious prejudices. (One of his characters says the following, which contains a large part of the mystery of faith: "It is a great way in fact[539] in mystical love to have previously exercised all the faculties of one's soul on that of a lover.")

The *Book of the Three Impostors*

A mythic book if there ever was one, the *De tribus impostoribus* haunted the imaginations of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance before offering bibliophiles occasions for research and passionate quarrels.

If there ever existed such a manuscript circulated hand to hand with all the attractions of peril and prohibition, its content probably added nothing to the thesis that its title proposed with such pleasing concision: three impostors have led the world — Moses, Jesus and Mohammed. Is it necessary to discover authors for such a formula, the obviousness of which would impose itself sooner or later, if only furtively, on anyone disturbed by the chaos and vexations ruling over society and the order of things? Goliards, ribald students, priests without modesty, bishops and popes less concerned with faith than prestige, peasants tyrannized by the aristocracy, bourgeois entangled in fiscal injustice, workers and unemployed workers begging in the streets day and night for a little food or money, women scorned or treated like Satan's creatures — who, one time or another, has not spit upon the holy figures erected everywhere like bloody totems for monotheism and its ministers?

A slightly exhaustive study of mindsets from the Fourth to the Eighteenth Centuries would show at what point religious belief — perhaps more in certain orthodoxies than in many heretical engagements — was generally only a prudent or comfortable covering, (*) under which the torments and fleeting satisfactions of passion were unleashed.

(*) In 1470, a police ordinance applied to beggars in Nuremberg conceded to them permission to exercise their trade on the condition that they knew how to recite the Pater, the Ave, the Credo and the ten commandments.

In the preface to his reprint of *De tribus impostoribus,*[540] Gerhardt Bartsch retraced the history of this text, which according to all probability existed as a short affidavit of its provocative assertion before acceding to the typographical reality of a book.[541]

Abu Tahir, a philosopher belonging to the Karmate current that, from the Ninth to the Tenth Centuries, rejected and ridiculed belief in Mohammed and Islam, said: "In this world, three individuals

[539] *Translator's note*: in criminal law, *chemin de fait* means a violent or illegal act.

[540] *Translator's note*: in 2002, Vaneigem himself edited and wrote a preface for a new edition of *The Three Impostors.* Published in French by Editions Payot & Rivages (Paris) under the title *L'Art de ne croire en rien, suivi de: Livre des trois imposteurs,* it also included a translation into French of *De arte nihil credendi* (*The Art of Believing in Nothing*).

[541] G. Bartsch, preface to the reprint of the *De tribus impostoribus,* Berlin, 1960.

have corrupted mankind: a shepherd, a physician and a camel-driver. And this camel-driver was the worst pickpocket, the worst prestidigitator of the three." This idea, adopted by Ibn Rachd, better known as Averroes,(*) suggested to the West the existence of a work as elusive as the opinion that it illustrated: the *Liber de tribus impostoribus sive Tractatus de vanitate religionum* (the *Book of the Three Impostors, or the Vanity of the Religions*).[542]

(*) "The Jewish religion is a law of children, the Christian religion a law of impossibility and the Muslim religion a law of swine."[543]

A professor at the Sorbonne and an admirer of Aristotle, Master Simon of Tournai (1130–1301) proclaimed — without being otherwise disturbed — that "the Jews were seduced by Moses, the Christians by Jesus and the Gentiles by Mohammed."[544]

The scholar La Monnoye, among the first people to study the question, cited the accusation made by Gregoire IX against Frederic II, for whom religion was a simple instrument of domination. For a long time, the book appeared (there was no proof) to have come from his pen, or that of his chancellor, Pierre de la Vigne.

According to Alvaro Pelayo, Thomas Scoto denounced the imposture of the prophets. Hermann of Rijswick referred to it in his confession. Putative authors were not lacking: Arnaud of Villeneuve, Michel Servetus, Jacques Gruet, Fausto Longiano (whose *Temple of the Truth* [now lost] dismissed all the religions), Jeannin of Solcia, the Canon of Bergamo (who was condemned on 14 July 1459 for affirming that the three impostors "governed the world with their fantasies"[545]) and all of the following: Ochino, Campanella, Le Pogge, Cardan, Pomponaccio and even Spinoza. (I have found no trace in the works of Antoine Couillard of the remark denounced by Drujon: "Jesus-Christ founded his religion on idiots.")

Studying the printed copy dated 1598, which he found at the Library of Vienna, Bartsch established that it was actually published much later. Without prejudging the prior existence of a manuscript copy, he confirmed Presser's thesis, according to which the book — published around 1753 — was the work of Johannes Joachim Mueller (1661–1733), grandson of the theologian Johannes Mueller (1598–1672), who was the author of a study entitled *Atheismus devictus.* Taught about the existence of the mythic book [*De tribus impostoribus*], Johannes Joachim undertook to give it a reality, and fixed — not without mischievousness — its date of publication at 1598, the date of his grandfather's birth.

In its modern version, *De tribus impostoribus* alludes to the Jesuits; it sets the "eternal truths" of each religion against the others. It emphasizes the incoherencies of the sacred texts and reaches this conclusion: there is no other God than nature, and no other religion than the laws of nature.

Matthias Knuetzen

A poet of atheism and the struggle against religious obscurantism, Matthias Knuetzen (1646–1674) knew an impassioned destiny that was exemplary in the history of the emancipation of mankind under the *Ancien Regime.*

His theses inspired the French encyclopedists, even though — with the exception of Naigeon — they were resolved not to mention him.

[542]Mosheim, *Histoire de l'Eglise,* p. 151; P. Marchand, *Dictionnaire historique,* vol. II.
[543]J. Nevisan, *Sylvae nuptialis libri sex.*
[544]*Collectio de scandalis ecclesiae,* Florence, 1931.
[545]Rainaldus, *Annales ecclesiastiques,* t. XIV.

Born in 1646 in Oldenmouth, in Holstein, he was the son of an organist. Upon the death of his parents, he was welcomed by Pastor Fabricius, who took care of his education, but without — or so it seems — inculcating in the boy the obedience and austerity of the morals that were pleasing to God. His studies of theology in Koenigsberg ended up winning him over to atheism.

At the age of 21, he returned to his hometown without a strong desire to preach there. In 1668, he enrolled at the University of Copenhagen, where he wrote *De lacrimus Christi* (now lost). Upon his return to Oldenmouth, he scandalized the good people by taking the floor at Toenningen, in front of an assembly of peasants to whom he extolled rebellion against the Protestantism of the pastors and the absolutism of the princes. Banished by the city council in 1673, he took refuge at Krempen, in Denmark, and again took up his diatribes against the wealth of the consistories. Chased from Krempen, he traveled through Germany, where he publicly preached atheism and the struggle against the aristocracy. On 5 September 1674, he deposited at the principal church of Iena the manuscript of *Ein Gesprach zwischen einem Gastwirt und drei ungleichen Religionsgasten*[546] and the Latin text *Amicus Amicis Amica.* These anonymous lampoons, also sent to the principal authorities, aroused excitement in the fortified city.

Knuetzen just barely escaped the repression, went to Cobourg, where he distributed his *Amicus,* which he diligently recopied. He did the same in Nuremberg. He returned to Iena under the pseudonym of Matthew Donner. He spread the rumor of an international sect, the "Conscious" [*conscientaires*], of which he was the initiator. The sect only existed in his will to propagate individual freedom and revolt against all forms of power. And in fact his pamphlets — clandestinely printed by his emulators, the existence of whom the probably knew nothing about — circulated in France, where they counted among the first texts that opened a breach in the feudal citadel that the French Revolution would destroy. His traces disappeared in 1674 and the common opinion is that he died in Italy. One of his letters (falsely dated Rome) was published in French in *Interviews on Diverse Subjects in History* by La Croze in Cologne in 1711.

"Above all," he wrote in *Amicus,* "we deny God, and we hurl him down from his heights, rejecting the temple with all its priests. What suffices for us, the Conscious, is science, not one, but the greatest number (…). This is the consciousness that nature, benevolent mother of the humble people, has accorded to all men, in the place of the [various] Bibles."[547]

The Fall Of God

As Knuetzen wanted, the French Revolution hurled God down to earth, where he agonized for two centuries, surviving in the spirit of the great [political] ideologies that supplanted the European religions. At the end of the Twentieth Century, the collapse of both brought together in a unanimous discredit the residues of celestial thought, sacred and profane, theist and atheist, religious and lay.

The decline and fall of an intellectual conception of the living was completed in a state of indifference that contrasted with the rage that presided over its critique. The hatred of the "church-goers" [*calotins*], which, from the towns to the countrysides, was a prelude to the Revolution in its sacking of churches and monasteries, was legally consecrated in the Civil Constitution of the clergy, an act of

[546] *Translator's note*: German in the original: *A Conversation between an Innkeeper and Three Religious Guests.*

[547] G. Bartsch, *Ein deutscher Atheist und Revolutionar Demokrat der 17. Jahrhundert,* Berlin, 1965. One of Knuetzen's letters, falsely dated Rome, was published in French in the *Entretiens sur divers sujets d'histoire* of La Croze, in Cologne, 1711.

bureaucratization [*fonctionnarisation*] that marked the end of religious power over the citizenry, for which Statist repression was quickly substituted.

Promulgated in 1790 by the French Revolution, the Civil Constitution of the clergy offered few points in common with the provisions that had subjected the Anglican Church to royal power. More than just the prerogatives of the pope, the influence of religion itself was revoked. The refusal of Roman authority proceeded from the destruction of the divine rights of kings.

Supported by the new exigencies of the economy, philosophy triumphed over a "religious obscurantism" that in fact did not stop haunting it, perpetuating in enlightened mindsets the bloody stupidity that tore the individual away from what was most alive so as to identify it with the frozen truths of science, politics, sociology, ethics and ethos. The flag effaced the cross, before being burned in its turn. Although the collapse of Jacobinism and Bonapartism gave the Church of the Nineteenth Century a considerable power, Catholicism and Protestantism — worn away by social modernity — did not cease to decline. At the dawn of the Twenty-First Century, they only survive as the folklore recounted on Sundays.

In the towns as well as in the countrysides, the first months of the revolutionary effervescence decided the fate of the clergy. The [Church] dignitaries, closer to the aristocracy than to the people, shared the discredit of the *Ancien Regime.* Some of them chose prudence and conciliation. The others, espousing the convictions of their parishioners, honored themselves by representing them at the National Assembly. From their zeal came the image of "Citizen Jesus," which demonstrated — even in the theology of liberation — the astonishing capacity of religious values to adapt.

One refused to swear [*jurer*] allegiance to the Civil Constitution and preferred exile or clandestinity; another gave sermons and perjured himself [*se parjurerent*] at the opportune moment; and another took a career (full of risks) as a State civil servant. The civil servants' discomfort grew to the extent that Jacobinite centralism displeased the provinces and countrysides, and aroused liberal insurrections and Catholic peasant revolts.

After eight months of silence, Pope Pius VI condemned the Civil Constitution as "heretical and schismatic." He was soon hanged and burned in effigy in the garden of the Tuileries. Nevertheless, the parish priests gained in political character what they lost in sacralized virtue. Those who, in the manner of Jacques Roux, took the side of the *Enrages* succumbed to Jacobin persecution. The unruly [*refractaires*] were pursued and those who swore allegiance were held to be hypocrites. The high clergy skillfully navigated so as to safeguard their privileges. Emblem of the two centuries to come, Tallyrand — unscrupulous enough to give sermons and consecrate other bishops who swore allegiance — used honorable mimicry to survive the Revolution, Bonapartism, Empire, the Restoration and the monarchy.

His exemplary modernity, his art of chipping away at the sacred in accordance with the necessities of politics, presaged the destiny of Christianity itself, which was condemned to become socialized before it succumbed to the indifference that market society would propagate in matters of opinion at the end of the Twentieth Century.

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